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Mountain Biking UK®

DEC 2014
ISSUE 318

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+ RULE ON SLABS & STEPS +
+ BLAST OVER ROCKS +
+ LUBE YOUR CHAIN +



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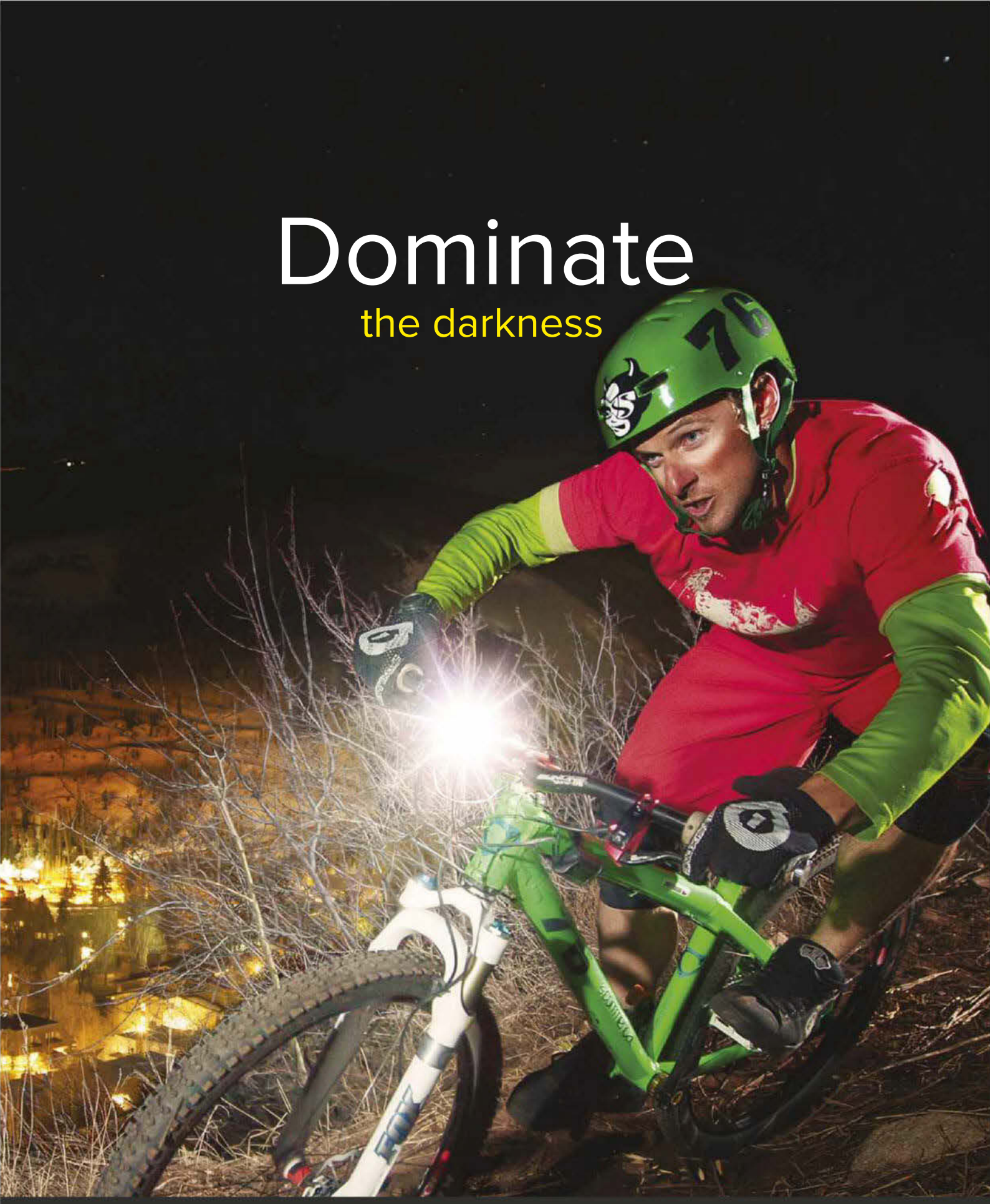
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VPP : 150mm Travel

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FREE PULL-OUT MAPS*

Four great routes – Peak District, Peaslake in the Surrey Hills, Exmoor plus a Big Ride in Kintail, Scotland

* Pull-out maps not available to overseas readers

MBUK

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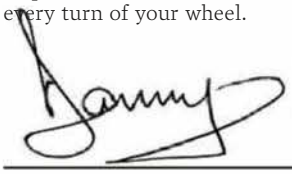
EDITOR'S LETTER

Go and get more dirty than ever!



Have you had your first proper mud ride of the winter yet? You know, the one where you head out in your freshly washed kit and come back as an unrecognisable blob, covered head-to-toe in the brown stuff. Face splattered with new freckles, save for a couple of rings round your eyes where your glasses have been. The texture of grit in your mouth, reminding you of those days as a kid when you used to eat soil just for the hell of it. Feels kinda good, doesn't it? It's a different sort of good to the drier dirty feeling you get from riding through summer. But it's good nonetheless.

And there'll be plenty more of that to come over the next few months as the trails become sloppier, slippier and altogether more challenging. But that's what makes riding in the UK so great, isn't it? Our gloriously different seasons mean you just manage to master riding on fast, grippy, dusty trails and then you're thrown headfirst into energy-sapping mud with zero traction. This means you're constantly improving your technique, maybe without you even realising. So embrace the slop to the full and rest assured that *MBUK* is here with you every turn of your wheel.



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Danny Walter *MBUK* Editor



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Out Front

THE **FIVE STORIES** LEADING THE WAY THIS MONTH





Photo: Russell Burton

ROC'IN OUT

The biggest event you've never heard of

WHAT STARTED WITH six friends competing against each other has, over 20 years, developed into the largest cycling event in Europe. Every October, 20,000 riders descend on the towns of Fréjus and Roquebrun-sur-Argens in southern France to compete in any of the 20 events that make up the Roc d'Azur. From enduro to cross-country, slopestyle to triathlon, and even BMX, the festival caters for everyone with a love of two wheels and a competitive bent, and is a hugely important fixture for riders from all over the continent who are eager to celebrate the bicycle.

While Roc d'Azur's sphere of influence across the Channel is huge, it's still relatively unheard of here in the UK. With stunning scenery and challenging terrain – from forest trails to coastal singletrack – not to mention the amazing weather this region boasts when the rest of Europe is feeling the first chills of winter, we think that'll soon change. We sent our Northern mile destroyer, Guy Kesteven, there this year to find out what all the fuss is about, so stay tuned for more on the Roc d'Azur next issue.

Gravity thrills for all

WITH A GREAT mix of natural and manmade XC trails and DH runs, the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire has long been one of the UK's most popular riding spots – and now it's set to extend its appeal to a whole new group of riders with the opening of the UK's first purpose-built trail for four-wheeled gravity bikes.

Developed in association with the Rough Riderz club – who tested all the jumps and berms as they were being built to make sure they flowed nicely on four wheels – the new Launch Pad trail will be officially open to the public by the time you read this.

It's been built by Architrail – the team behind the Ashton Court and Leigh Woods trails in nearby Bristol and the DH runs at Antur Stiniog in North Wales, among many others – and funded by the Gloucestershire Environmental Trust (£35,000, with landfill tax contributions) and Forestry Commission (£17,500). And never fear, it won't be just for four-wheelers.

"Our aim wasn't to simply build a wider MTB trail, but one that would help riders new to gravity biking build confidence and progress their skills," says Architrail's Ed Wright. So, expect to see disabled riders mixing it up with first-time downhillers – as well as gravity veterans looking for a flat-out fast speed fix – giving even more people the chance to experience the joys of mountain biking.





The rubber revolution

TYRES MIGHT NOT be the most exciting components, but as the only contact point between your bike and the trail, they have a big impact on performance. It doesn't matter how light, strong and dialled your bike is, or how fit and strong you are – if your tyres aren't up to the job you'll find yourself struggling for grip and pace, and the hundreds or even thousands of pounds you've invested in your riding will be going to waste.

It's a good thing, then, that today's tyre market is rammed with top-quality options that use the latest tread patterns, rubber compounds and carcass technology to increase grip, improve rolling speed and combat punctures. From tubular XC racing tyres (which are glued straight on to the rim, saving the weight of an inner tube or sealant) to multi-compound, heavily reinforced downhill and enduro tyres, there's never been a better time to be in the market for fresh rubber.

The downside is that there's so much choice, it's easy to get lost. Unless you swap tyres regularly, it's best to focus on the trails you ride regularly, and the kind of riding you do most of the time. There's no point opting for the latest enduro race tyres for the local trail centre loop, where the thick carcass isn't warranted and the soft rubber will make long climbs hard work. The same goes for running mud spikes during dry spells. Pick the right tyres though, and recent leaps forward in design mean they'll help you go further, faster and have more fun riding than ever before.



Operation is simple – hit the smaller button to turn it on, then the big switch to start filming

Strapped and stick-on helmet mounts are both included in the box

SHIMANO'S GOPRO RIVAL

The XTR of action cams?

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THE ACTION CAMERA market is crowded with brands claiming to have the next big thing. What makes this new addition stand out is that it's from Japanese groupset giants and renowned perfectionists Shimano.

Measuring in at 70 x 44 x 30mm, the Shimano Sport Camera is far from big and clunky, and it's been designed first and foremost to be worn, with helmet mounts included and a chest mount available too. It can capture 1,080-pixel Full HD footage at 30 frames per second, but it's the slightly lower resolution and higher frame rate 720p/120fps setting that'll be of most use to mountain bikers.

There's a six-megapixel still setting for those extreme selfies, and built in wi-fi and a dedicated smartphone app mean you can use your Apple or Android device as a viewfinder, to review footage and change the settings. The camera has ANT+ connectivity too, so you can link it up with power meters, heart-rate belts – and Shimano's new electronic XTR Di2 groupset. Does this signal a future where cameras will be integrated into our bikes? It's too early to tell, but Shimano have never been ones to do things by halves.

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TRACY MOSELEY

Clash of the downhill Titans

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TRACY MOSELEY SECURED her second Enduro World Series title in September, adding to an impressive tally of British wins and proving that she'd made the right decision to switch her focus from downhill to enduro. But it was no walk in the park for the former world champion, who found herself pitted against arguably the greatest mountain bike racer of all time, France's 13-time DH world champ Anne-Caroline Chausson.

"Not having Anne-Caro at all the races in 2013 definitely gave me a slightly easier pass to that title," says Tracy. "But winning was still a huge surprise. Being the first ever World Enduro Series, it was a year of learning about the sport and its demands. 2014 was different – we all knew what to expect, the standard of racing, professionalism and expectation were all higher, and Anne-Caro was at every single round."

The race for the series title was close run, with Tracy finally beating her rival by just 30 points – and she knows the competition will be even fiercer next year. "The World Series is as serious as World Cup DH now, with people arriving days before the race and getting shuttled up to walk stages and GoPro them. I hoped it'd take a few years to get to that stage!"

Photo: Ste

REDEFINE YOUR LIMITS

Rider: Chris Porter / Trans Provence Photo: Sven Martin



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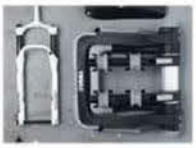
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36 CHRISTMAS LIST
Best gifts for MTB fans

Photo: Markus Greber/Red Bull Content Pool

Far from civilisation Riding a disused railroad in the Argentine desert – p62

Exposure vs identity

Are we damaging our sport by taking it away from the mountains?

When you think about mountain biking, what springs to mind? Rolling hills, forests, alpine singletrack and chairlifts into the mountains, perhaps? How about the hustle and bustle of a city centre? Probably not, but that's where some of the sport's biggest events take place. Events like the insane City Downhill World Tour and freeride comps such as the Red Bull District Ride attract some massive crowds, and that means they're popular with many riders too – why risk life and limb for a couple of ramblers and your riding buddies out in the hills when you can have a cheering crowd five deep on either side of you? It's good for the riders, their sponsors and, on a good day, their bank balance too.

But how about the sport? These events expose mountain biking to a huge audience and arguably introduce new people to the joys of riding. But are we damaging the sport's identity by showcasing something that isn't 'proper mountain biking'? Whatever your view, this move away from the mountains is set to continue. But given that we pride ourselves on being able to ride on any terrain, does it really matter so long as we're having fun?



2015's hottest bikes Six trail-taming machines tested – p108

Performance placebo or vital kit?

Sometimes it pays to be materialistic!

Whether it's the best gear money can buy or simply the cheapest stuff that'll get the job done, there's no getting away from the fact that we need a lot of kit just to ride our bikes.

And while most of us try to limit the amount of stuff we buy, there's always something new and shiny to lure us in with the promise of higher performance, lighter weight or better looks. A new set of tyres with the right tread pattern and compound for your regular trails will make a positive difference to how your bike rides, but it's harder to justify a new stem that's only a few grams lighter than the old one, or a helmet in this season's must-have colours.

These things aren't going to make a physical difference to your ride, but at a psychological level, they can do something rather special. New gear, no matter how inconsequential, can lift your spirits, boost your confidence and inspire you to get out and ride. Even the least materialistic among us must surely have felt that buzz you get as you head to the trails for the first time to try out your latest acquisition.

We all get our kicks in different ways. If tricking out your ride for the sake of it rather than for performance gains makes you happier, then go for it.

Photo: Russell Burton

INSTANT EXPERT

ANDREU LACONDEGUY

If you haven't heard of the awesome Andreu Lacondeguy before, where have you been?! He's one of the biggest names in freeride mountain biking, and is one hell of a character off the bike too. Here's all you need to know...



01 SPANISH STAR Born in 1989 near Barcelona, Andreu is a fan of anything on two wheels – as well as freeride, he rides dirt jumps, BMX and motocross. He has his own trails where he and his brother Luis build jumps to go big!



02 BIG TRICKS Andreu has some of the biggest and most intricate tricks on the circuit, and likes to nail new moves on his BMX before perfecting them on his mountain bike. He's got a huge amount of natural style and a ton of flow.



03 PUSH THE LIMIT Andreu and Luis spend a lot of time in California, riding with other big names and trying to push the boundaries of freeride. The freeride guys are like a family – everyone gets stoked when someone pulls off a new big trick.



04 RAD RAMPAGE Andreu has an impressive competition results list, racking up a number of world level wins and 'best trick' prizes. He won at Red Bull Rampage this year, sealing his place as one of the best freeriders of all time.



05 DOUBLE UP Andreu is happy to admit it's a 'double or nothing' game to him. He holds the record for being the first MTB rider to land a backflip on a snow-covered jump and was also one of the first riders to land a double backflip on dirt.

Ask the experts

#5 HOW CAN I REDUCE ARM PUMP ON DOWNHILLS?

Hands and forearms can take a battering when riding aggressively. If your forearms pump up and your hands become clamped to the bar, you need to look at your bike set-up and riding technique.



Brake levers
Make sure your brake levers are set at a comfortable angle. If they're angled too far down you may be bringing too much weight on to the handlebar when you reach over to the levers.



Handlebar set-up
High-rise bars and short stems are great for riding downhill because they bring your weight back and can relieve the pressure on your arms. But if your bar or stem is too high it can become hard to weight the front tyre for cornering.



Riding technique
Concentrate on moving your weight around the bike using your feet and hips. For steep sections and hard braking, make sure your weight is back and your heels are down. Riding more often is sometimes the easiest solution to arm pump.



About the expert Neil Donoghue is the 2014 UK Gravity Enduro champion, a professional mountain bike coach and ex-World Cup downhiller. With 19 years' racing experience and five years as a coach, he knows small changes can make a big difference.

MBUK PRO'S EYE VIEW



ROWAN SORRELL

The man to thank for BPW's trails

"You don't know how much you're going to miss something until it's gone. That's the old cliché. Well, I definitely knew how much I'd miss riding.

After the trials and tribulations of building BikePark Wales, I was looking forward to a year of shredding. That plan was dashed when I sailed past the landing of a jump – carbon wheels are a lot faster than alloy! There was a big crunch and my foot went floppy. I knew I'd broken my leg.

I've been in this situation before, but this time was particularly challenging. I looked and felt like a caged animal. It's pretty surreal seeing metal bars screwed into your shin bone, and living with the metal frame for three months was a huge ball-ache. I was housebound and couldn't wear trousers.

"IT'S SURREAL SEEING METAL BARS SCREWED INTO YOUR SHIN"

The day I got my leg back was great, though it was so weak. Of course, this was outshone by the feeling of my first ride. It just felt like the most natural thing in the world, pumping and carving turns. I'm now looking forward to a winter of sliding about in the mud, happy as can be!"



LIKE THIS? TRY THESE!



TIDWORTH
Another CTC bike park with a mix of trails for all abilities



ASTON HILL
Chalky DH tracks with plenty of technical riding



PEASLAKE
Surrey Hills locals' playground – you'll need a guide if you don't know your way around!

THE LOWDOWN

Where: Rogate Woods are on Coombe Hill, just outside the village of Liss in Hampshire. There's a train station in Liss, a 2.5-mile ride to the park. By car, type GU51 5DL into your sat-nav and that should get you almost to the park.

RIDE HERE, RIGHT NOW!

Rogate Downhill, Hampshire

Brendan Fairclough's local push-up DH tracks

Rogate is an official CTC bike park, which means you have to pay to ride, but allows the trail builders to get away with building some big stuff that wouldn't be ticked off if the area were free to ride in.

Being one of World Cup star Brendan's Fairclough local spots, there's some pretty big stuff here, but whether you're experienced or not there are plenty of trails to have fun on. It's not totally a downhill bike venue either, with a good proportion of riders heading to Rogate on hard-hitting trail bikes.

The woods contain 10 downhill tracks managed and maintained by Rogate Downhill Club. Though short, they're super-fun, and have been featured in a good few bike videos in recent years. From easy lines all the way up to super-technical trails and big jumps, and with a mixture of open terrain and woodland, Rogate has it all. There's also a skills area where you can build your confidence ready to go big, and a dual slalom track that's a ton of fun for racing your mates on.

Rogate Downhill is a great place for practising your DH racing skills too, as all the tracks are permanently taped to let riders know where to go – and to make sure people stay where they should! There are no facilities at Rogate, but the rawness adds to the atmosphere. It's a true locals' spot with plenty of digging and riding going down at weekends and a proper local scene, welcoming in riders from afar to the trails.

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POWER UP:	*Rechargeable via Micro USB for ultimate convenience*
SRP:	*Rear Only £39.99*





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135mm. 99g. RRP : £24.99

AARON GWIN
2-time UCI World Cup Downhill Champion

odi

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THE INDISPENSABLES

#19 FATBIKE ESSENTIALS

Take your fatbike from fad to rad with the latest fat-specific kit



1 MUDGUARDS

Big wheels make a big mess. Keep the worst of the mud/spray/snow/sand at bay by fitting a set of super-wide mudguards.

Mucky Nutz Fat Butt Fender £8.99 (rear)
Mucky Nutz Fat Gut Fender £10.99 (down tube)
Mucky Nutz Fat Face Fender £13.99 (fork crown)
www.ison-distribution.com

2 SUSPENSION FORK

Turn your adventure bike into a reet proper trail tamer with up to 120mm (4.7in) of front suspension travel. Contrary to popular belief, this doesn't defy the point of riding a fatbike – it just makes it even more fun!

RockShox Bluto fork £479.99 www.sram.com

3 BIKE RACK

Options to get your fatbike to the trails – other than riding there, of course – are currently limited. A boot rack will work with any size tyres, unlike most roof and towbar mounted bike carriers.

Thule RaceWay three-bike boot rack £259.99 www.madison.co.uk

4 TUBELESS KIT

A big proportion of a fatbike's weight is in its wheels so try lightening the load with a specialist tubeless kit. For the adventurers out there, Orange Seal's Subzero sealant claims to work in "extreme low temperatures".

Orange Seal Fat Tire Kit £TBC http://orangesealed.com

5 SEMI-SLICK TYRES

With a set of these mahoosive 26x3.5in semi-slicks pumped up with a few more psi than usual, you'll be able to tear up the streets on your ride to work. They've even got nifty white sidewalls for a go-faster look.

On-One BSC Type 1 tyre £49.99 www.on-one.co.uk

KNOW YOUR BIKE

UNLOCKING THE TECHNICAL JARGON TO EXPLAIN HOW OUR BIKES WORK

AIR-SPRUNG VS COIL-SPRUNG SUSPENSION

AIR

Air-sprung forks and shocks have become the norm thanks to their low weight and ability to be instantly adjusted to suit a rider's weight by increasing or decreasing air pressure. Downsides can include reduced small-bump suppleness and inconsistent damping on long descents due to heat build-up. Air springs also have a naturally progressive shock curve, which won't suit those who prefer a more linear feel.

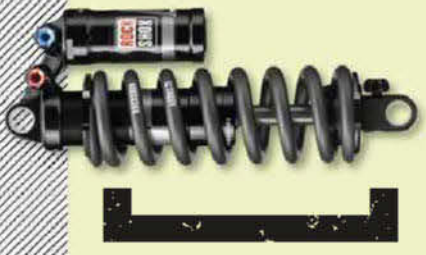
Fox Float X
The latest 'piggyback' air shocks, such as Fox's Float X, deliver coil-like performance in a lighter package, making them popular with enduro racers.



COIL

Coil-sprung forks and shocks lack the range of preload adjustment of air units, with the rider having to physically swap coil springs to set their suspension up for their weight. While the heft of coil-sprung dampers also goes against them, their performance on demanding terrain is hard to match so they're favoured by downhill racers.

RockShox Vivid
Heavy-duty dampers like the RockShox Vivid R2C are designed to lap up the gnarlier terrain found on the World Cup DH circuit and at events like Red Bull Rampage.



The Pulse



THANK GOD FOR...

MANMADE TRAILS

DON'T GET US wrong – we love riding loamy, scratched in, 'natural' singletrack. But the reality of living in the UK is that riding those loamy trails in the wet winter months just ruins them for next year. It's not as fun as riding them in the dry either, because the beautiful organic loam just turns into a sloppy mess.

Granted, manmade, surfaced trails mean you lose the beauty of getting loam sprayed up your leg in the turns, but they're an option that we can't help but love through winter. These manmade trails are built to drain well and put up with our British weather, which means no slop, not too many puddles and the ability to carry on running summer tyres and going flat-out fast!

The berms and jumps are fun too, and riding with your mates through the winter on surfaced trails will have you pushing your limits rather than just trying to deal with the trail conditions!



FLASHBACK

1990s
MALVERN CLASSIC



BACK IN THE Nineties, when mountain biking was just a fledgling sport compared to what it is today, getting big air was considered just as bonkers as it is now. The difference being that big air back then was stuff like road gap jumps and airing out of bombholes to see who could go highest. They may look small and laughably tame now, but back then those jumps could get you a pro deal!

THAT WAS THEN

THIS IS NOW!

#48 Getting big air

2014
FEST SERIES



GETTING HUGE AIR has progressed more than anyone ever thought possible. Looking at the 70ft doubles on the FEST Series courses, where the competitors ride downhill rigs to cope with the size of the jumps, it really is big air. If you'd told us 10 years ago that riders would be going this big, we'd have laughed you out of the room! We just wonder what we'll be doing in another 10 years...

London Bike Show

The London Bike Show returns to ExCeL London from 12-15 February 2015 and once again it'll be packed to the rafters with all the latest gear from the best brands. There'll be daily demos from the Animal WD-40 Action Sports Tour team, an indoor test track where you can try out the latest bikes and the opportunity to watch the pros battle it out on the DMR pump track and have a taster session yourself in between races. *MBUK* readers can get 30 per cent off entry – just order tickets by 31 December using the code MBUK10. For more information, visit **www.thelondonbikeshow.co.uk**.



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[1] When paired with your Bluetooth or Bluetooth® Smart Ready phone and the Garmin Connect™ Mobile app



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SCOTT

LIFTING THE LID

Juggling a full-time job with racing isn't easy, but away from the big teams, it's a way of life

#6 JAMES GREEN

Like many of the first swathe of riders to join the growing enduro scene, James used to be a keen downhill racer. "In my final season I became bored of all the waiting around and just wanted to ride my bike more," he says. "If riding up was the answer, then so be it!"

A teacher by trade, he finds it difficult to fit in training and racing, but is determined to persevere. "We don't just start at 9am and finish at 3pm, often working well into the evenings and weekends," says James. "While most people finish at 5pm and switch off from their job, I'm still trying to squeeze my training in and then mark a pile of books until 9pm most nights, but then the holidays aren't bad!"



MUD DEFENCE
James runs a Rock Guardz carbon mudguard and uses a thick 3M vinyl sticker from sponsors Renthal to stop mud collecting in the latticework in the back of his fork brace

RACE FACE x E*13
Race Face's Next SL carbon cranks fitted with a 34t direct-mount Narrow/Wide ring and an e*thirteen XCX chain guide provide a solid, lightweight and reliable pedalling set-up

SRAM XX1
SRAM's top-of-the-range 11-speed transmission delivers effortless shifting with appropriate ratios for enduro racing

"THE RACE PUSHED ME SO FAR TO THE EDGE THAT I COULDN'T TALK FOR 15 MINUTES AFTER I FINISHED"

See more of James's bike at MBUK.com

• VITALS •

Name: James Green
Age: 28
From: Stourbridge, West Mids
Day Job: Year 6 primary school teacher
Discipline(s): Enduro
Category: Elite
Sponsors: The Trailhead, Cube, Schwalbe, Renthal, SealSkinz, Torq, Royal Racing, Invisiframe, Wenlock Spring, Ballard and Bakers Patterns
Bike: Cube Stereo 160 Super HPC SLT 27.5
How long racing? Four years enduro, five years DH
What got you into MTBing? My buddy Fletch got me into it when we were kids. We used to build jumps around the back of a pub, then found local spots like Wolverley and Halesowen
What makes this bike so good? It's been incredible all year – one of the most durable bikes I've had in a long time, and at 27lb it makes riding uphill almost pleasurable!
Favourite race venue:? Whistler, baby!
Favourite race: Round 6 of the 2014 Enduro World Series in Whistler. It pushed me so far to the edge that I couldn't talk for 15 minutes after I finished
Best result: Third overall in the 2011 UK Gravity Enduro series
Why do you love racing? Travelling, seeing my buddies and pushing my limits

Photo: Jacob Gibbins

MBUK

RETAIL THERAPY

Perfect pressies

WHETHER YOU'RE AN XC WHIPPET OR A GRAVITY ADDICT, HERE'S A LOAD OF GEAR YOU'D BE HAPPY TO FIND UNDER THE CHRISTMAS TREE.



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XC/trail favourites, now with a high-volume option for wider feet.

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11 GOPRO HERO CAMERA

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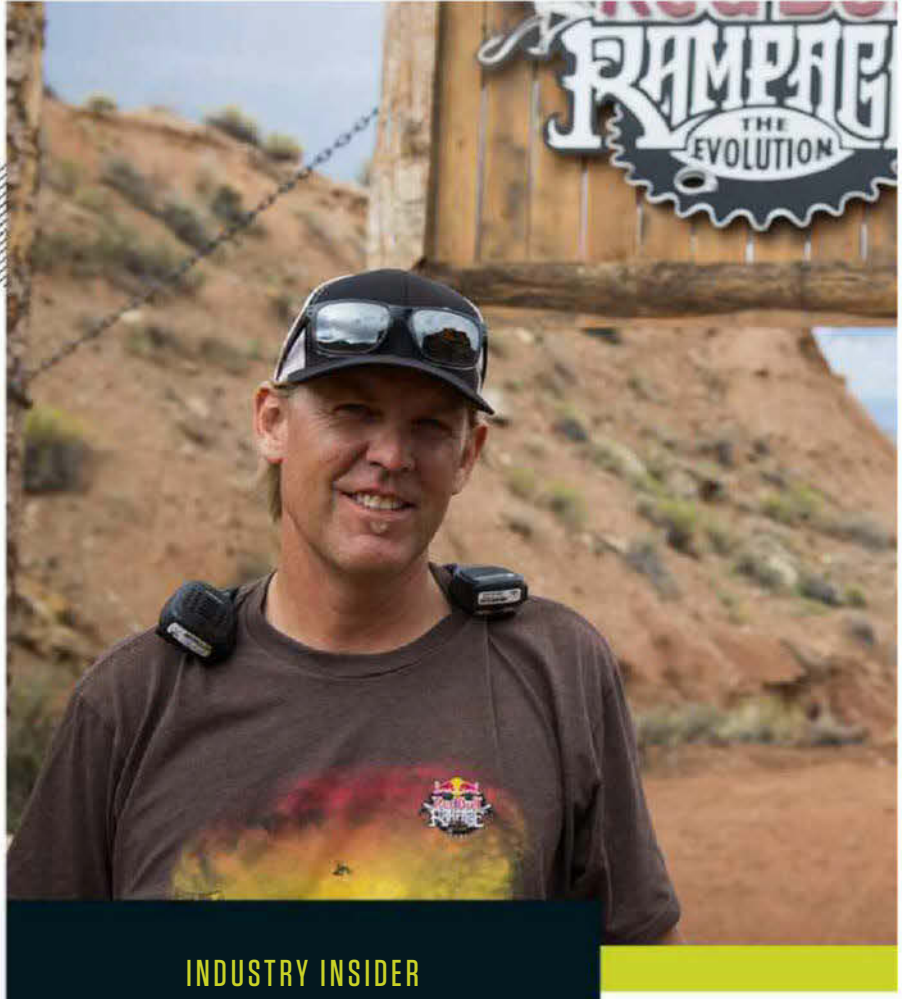


Photo: Ian Collins

INDUSTRY INSIDER

TODD BARBER

THE MAN BEHIND RAMPAGE

As the president of the Freeride Mountain Bike Association and founder of Red Bull Rampage, if anyone can talk with authority on the subject of freeride mountain biking, it's Todd Barber.

Rampage evolution
The event has grown in stature over the past 13 years but the ethos is the same – to see what's possible on a mountain bike. The progression every year never ceases to amaze. Just when you think the athletes can't go any bigger or more technical, Cam Zink throws a 55ft '3' off a huge cliff or Tom van Steenbergen attempts a frontflip over a 73ft canyon gap.

Standout moment
One of my favourite memories is from 2002, when Bearclaw [Darren Berrecloth] showed up on a beat-up old bike and said he was going to ride and wouldn't take no for answer. He ended up taking third with a huge Indian air and blew everyone's minds with his aggressive skills.

Lives at risk?
The risks are massive at Rampage, but some people misunderstand these athletes and peg them as reckless. Every one of them knows their own limits, and it's not only the level of riding that's risen each year, it's also their preparedness. They bring some of the most experienced trail builders from around the world to assist with their builds. This has made their lines safer, with better transitions and landings.

Those presenters...
Whether it's the judging, the announcers, wood features... there'll always be a difference of opinion. We always try to improve for next year though.

Logistical nightmare
Rampage is a year-round job. Plus there's new talent each year and it's a massive job to determine which athletes have the skills that'll translate well to this event.

Specialisation
The lines between dirt jumping, slopestyle and big mountain were a bit grey in the past but they're becoming more defined. At some point it could make sense to divide freeride into separate disciplines, but not until there are more events and a larger number of athletes competing in each discipline.

Live streaming
It's a pretty amazing time, with the ease of viewing events and mountain bike content in general. I hope everyone appreciates the investment that Red Bull are making into broadcasting these events. It's a massive financial investment and it's hard to imagine where some sports would be right now without their support.

THE BEST OF... MANCHESTER

Manchester – birthplace of the industrial revolution and home of the best music scene this country has ever known, not to mention DH World Cup champ Josh Bryceland. The capital of the North has a lot to offer, says Burgtec's **Dave Barton**.



ACCOMMODATION

You won't struggle for accommodation in Manchester, with plenty of cheap hotels peppering the city. The Holiday Inn in Manchester Central Park is cycle friendly, with secure parking and bikes allowed to be stored inside – a must when travelling with expensive rides.

TRAILS

Not many cities can boast of a 10km off-road loop within 10 minutes of the city centre. On the outskirts, the Peak District offers up some great XC and trail riding, with some classic manmade action at Lee and Cragg quarries further north and some great natural options to the south in Macclesfield Forest.

FOOD

The Northern Quarter has plenty of good restaurants to satisfy all tastes and appetites. Home Sweet Home in Edge Street does some great snacks. If you fancy something more upmarket, try Artisan in Spinningfields. If you're riding in Macc Forest, don't forget to have a pub lunch at Leather's Smithy.

ENTERTAINMENT

From indie to house, dance to drag queens, Manchester's nightlife caters for everything you could ever wish for. If you've still got plenty of energy after a day of riding, head to Chill Factor[e] for some skiing/snowboarding or even a spot of indoor skydiving! Alternatively, try the Dog Bowl for a spot of 10-pin bowling.

RIDE THE EARTH

10 NUGGETS OF BRITISH COLUMBIAN GOLD

British Columbia, in the south-west of Canada, has been shaping and progressing the sport for over a decade now, influencing riders, trails and bikes all over the world.

ALASKA

YUKON TERRITORIES

CANADA

ALBERTA

BRITISH COLUMBIA

KAMLOOPS

VANCOUVER

USA

Silver Star Bike Park

Silver Star has it all, from XC trails graded from green to black, to the infamous double black diamond DH and freeride trails that have featured in their fair share of videos over the years.

Sun Peaks Bike Park

With nearly 2,000 vertical feet of lift-accessed fun and 35 trails that range from natural to manmade and offer everything from scenic XC riding to all-mountain shredding and world-class DH tracks to test the best, Sun Peaks packs a punch!

Retallack

Nestled within the Selkirk Mountains on the eastern edge of BC, the trail network surrounding Retallack offers riders a unique 'backcountry' experience, with everything from epic singletrack loops to full on big-mountain freeride lines.

Whistler Bike Park

If one location can define what a bike park is, it's Whistler. With almost 5,000 vertical feet of lift-accessed trails, it's the number one location for gravity mountain biking anywhere in the world.

Panorama Bike Park

Located in the Kootenay Rockies, Panorama has a reputation for challenging, natural terrain and a more secluded feel than BC's other bike resorts, with their lift queues and braking bumps.

Coast Gravity Park

The brainchild of the Coastal Crew, this bike park is unusual in that it doesn't do double duty as a ski resort in winter. Situated on the Sunshine Coast, 70km north-east of Vancouver, all eyes are on this new and exciting addition to BC's riding scene.

Squamish

Within spitting distance of both the hustle and bustle of Vancouver and the madness of Whistler, Squamish offers riders a unique riding experience within some stunning scenery, with everything from epic XC adventures to flat-out DH runs.

The North Shore

Vancouver's infamous North Shore has influenced many changes within the sport and continues to do so to this day. While the tree line 'skinnies' have on the most part gone, the trails below are some of the best in the province.

Kamloops

Often regarded as the birthplace of the freeride scene, and with riders such as Matt Hunter and Graham Agassiz calling it home, Kamloops has certainly played its part in the sport's evolution.

Fernie

With an extensive network of trails to test your mettle on, you won't struggle to find adventure in the mountains. Alongside this is the Fernie Alpine Resort, with plenty of list-accessed fun.

SOMMET



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Tubeless Ready
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Tubeless Ready
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Eyletted
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MBUK STAR LETTER

After a great day's riding, we were on our way home in high spirits when we passed an old quarry. After uttering the cursed words "one last go", my partner Sarah shot over a drop way too fast, got bucked and flew 30ft before landing on her head. The thought that I'd lost her was a feeling I'll never forget. She was unconscious, not breathing, with cuts and grazes on her face and blood and grit in her mouth.

It was a great relief to see the paramedics arrive. They loaded her into a helicopter and I made my way to hospital, only to hear the devastating news that she was in a coma. These were the worst 24 hours of my life.

Thankfully they managed to wake Sarah the next day. A couple of days later she started communicating, and one of the first things she asked was: "Is my bike OK?" She's amazed the doctors with her recovery rate. She had some small tears to the brain but no bleeds, brain damage or breakages, which is a bit of a miracle. I can't thank the Lincolnshire & Nottinghamshire Air Ambulance team and Nottingham Traumatic Brain Injury Service enough.

The support has been amazing too, with messages and tweets from the likes of Steve Peat, Gee and Rachel Atherton, Josh Bryceland, Tahnée Seagrave, Manon Carpenter, Matt Simmonds, Greg Minnaar and her hero, Cedric Gracia.

Sarah can't wait to get back on her bike again and hit the jumps, with it looking like she'll make a full recovery. The first thing she got on in her physio session was an exercise bike!
RYAN BRADSHAW, VIA EMAIL



The face may say 'pain' but the hand says 'ready to rock' – heal up quickly, Sarah!

That's the sign of a true mountain biker – checking your bike's OK while you lie there in a mangled heap! It's brilliant to hear Sarah is doing so well. The air ambulance services don't always get the praise they deserve, but they do an amazing job, picking up those who've nailed themselves in the pursuit of fun.



If your letter gets picked as the Star Letter, you'll receive a pair of DMR Vault pedals worth £99.99, courtesy of Upgrade (**www.upgradebikesco.uk**). For full *Mountain Biking UK* terms and conditions, see p14.

No laughing matter

As a keen mountain biker with mountain biking kids, I read your That's Gotta Hurt segment with interest. More so because I'm a trauma and orthopaedic surgeon covering the South Lakes and North West Dales. I often discuss it with colleagues and friends in the local mountain rescue organisations.

To anyone in the know, it's clear that many of the injuries are a whisker away from being life changing. Broken wrists that require open plating can be a career changer for anyone with a manual job. And it's rare for a rider with a spinal fracture resulting in 2cm of shortening (issue 305) to be back on the podium – or doing anything else useful – three months later.

I'm not against risk. As well as mountain biking I've been a climber and skier most of my life and have had significant injuries. But risk needs to be managed rather than celebrated. Crashing while traversing a previously unridden mountain pass is probably worth it. Landing on your head doing a backflip that's never been practised with a foam pit isn't. For experienced riders, I'm teaching Grandma to suck eggs. For newer riders, don't imagine it's all back slaps, high fives and back on your bike next week after a serious injury.
DAVID KNOWLES, LANCASTER
If there's one thing we've learned during 26 years of MBUK, it's that getting injured sucks. That's Gotta Hurt isn't there to celebrate injury, it's there to remind us that for every ride packed with good times and photo opportunities there's the odd one that comes to a premature and sometimes painful end. OK, If your photo's chosen you get a prize, but we'd much rather have a working set of limbs...

TWEETS OF THE MONTH

When you have to watch babies and you just want to shuttle some DH...
To all those frustrated new fathers out there, you're not alone! Cam Zink has been hanging at home with the rugrats, dreaming of getting out on his bike.

Born again biker

I've finally come back to the fold after a long 12 years off the bike (beer and women took over for a while), to see a rake of new developments on the scene. But the »

mag that started it all is still as solid as ever, with a nice batch of stickers on the cover and one of the Mint Sauce cartoons that drew me in in the first place! Thanks to the Cycle to Work scheme I now have a shiny new Cannondale and a reignited passion for two wheels. So thanks for still being there for this born again biker!
ROSS JAMES, VIA EMAIL
Our pleasure, Ross. Ignore the funny sized wheels and uppy/downy seatposts and you'll find nothing much has changed – mountain biking's still all about having a blast with your mates, and so is MBUK.

Cool commute

Since being knocked off my road bike and having to commute by mountain bike instead, I've realised how much fun you can have deviating from your usual route to work. There's not much excitement on a ride through Ipswich normally, but those stairs you ride round on your road bike, you can breeze down on your MTB, before bunnyhopping the next curb, riding up the grass verge and shooting over the little hill while imagining you're Gee Atherton. I'm not sure I want the road bike fixed...
JOSH BROOKE, IPSWICH
Darn right, Josh – mountain bikes may not be the fastest or most efficient way to get to work, but they're definitely the most fun.

Stay saver

After an awesome first visit to Llandegla I'm planning my return, but with some extra protection for my Lapierre Zesty. I made this chainstay protector from some insulation tape and some black bobbly things I found in the junk drawer that are proper sticky!
PAUL BEAUMONT, HUDDERSFIELD
We love a bit of DIY bodgery, Paul, but we'd be looking to add a bit more protection – replacement carbon chainstays don't come cheap!



Those bobbles might ward off the chain, but won't do much against rock strikes

The small print
Email your letters and photos to **mbuk@bikeradar.com**.
- The 'Star Photo' winner will receive a Lezyne CNC Dirt Floor Drive pump worth £89.99.
- The 'That's Gotta Hurt' winner will receive a Lezyne Port A Shop toolkit worth £99.99.
- The 'Hardcore Heroes' winner will receive an Effetto Mariposa Caffélatex Tubeless Conversion Kit worth £49.99

Turn to p14 for full *Mountain Biking UK* terms and conditions.

TWEETS OF THE MONTH

So, today is the day I'm on *Blue Peter*. Check it out on CBBC. I, on the other hand, am off for a surf so I'll probably miss it
Enduro ace and skills coach Neil Donoghue is a man who's got his priorities right! Who needs fame when there's a sweet swell waiting?

Can't believe *The Ridge* has had over 7.5 million views! Thanks so much from myself and the team for all your support!
If you haven't watched Danny MacAskill's latest vid, do yourself a favour and head to YouTube right now – epic scenery and epic moves, and all on a full-susser.

I've got a big couple of weeks ahead. Very excited to say the least!
What's our mate Danny Hart up to? Meeting new sponsors perhaps? The 2015 team rumour mill is already in full swing!



We're not sure if **MATT HALL** is always this cheerful or just in shock, but that's a sizable hole the SketchyMTB rider managed to put in his arm on the Wibbly Wobbly red run at BikePark Wales

WIN Lezyne tool package





TRIS JACKSON'S definitely got his race face on in this one! Pic by **STEFAN GOSTLING**



ED RICHARDSON sent in this cheeky pic taken during a uni mountain bike expedition to the Gower Peninsula



ROBERT IRVINE from Edinburgh took this moody shot of his Yeti 575 at the top of the Fort William red run – "It was great fun, far more technical than I expected and, with a bit of wind, very challenging – a lot more black than red!"



Here's **PAUL BENNETT** redefining the phrase 'dead sailor' at Howden Dam in Derbyshire. Insert groan-inducing dam/damn pun of your choice here...



WILLIAM ROBINSON sends a dirt jump he built on his grandad's land with three friends and a digger

MBUK STAR PHOTO



PHIL DAGGET was kind enough to provide some lunchtime entertainment for these hikers on a ride through Austwick in the Yorkshire Dales. Photo from **PAUL CARPENTER**

WHAT YOU COULD WIN...
The Lezyne CNC Dirt Floor Drive track pump is made from durable CNC machined aluminium and has an oversized barrel, piston, hose and connectors to deliver twice as much air per stroke and quickly fill tyres or seat tubeless tyre systems. For more info, visit **www.upgradebikes.co.uk.**



Here's **TIM UPSTON** in action at Llangollen on an Army Downhill Team pre-season training camp



DAVID HERRON stops for some lunch with a view at the top of High Cup Nick in Cumbria



GLENN and **DYLAN PEARCE** decided they had to ride the biggest mountain in the UK. Cue an epic nine-hour trip to the 1,344m summit of Ben Nevis and back. They seem pretty stoked to have finally reached the top!



When he's not fixing bikes for the folk of Leeds with his mobile spannering business Biking-Fix, **STEVE LANG** is, in his own words, "45 years old and still sending it" – in this case on Aston Hill's Surface To Air trail. Pic from **CALLUM** and **JOHN ARTHUR**

WIN Effetto tubeless kit



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MBUK FORUM
www.bikeradar.com/forums

How can I build up riding confidence?

Confidence comes from competence, and that takes time – **Festerfeet**

Not always. I'm incompetent but quite confident! – **RockMonkey SC**

Ride with someone who can act as a 'hare' for you – **The Rookie**

FACEBOOK
www.facebook.com/MBUKMag

Most essential bit of winter kit?

As long as I have a dry arse, I'm happy – **Christopher 'Suggsey' Smith**

SealSkinz waterproof socks – worth every penny – **Andy Stevenson**

It's a garage. Bike stays in it – **Christopher Harrington**

Determination. And Gore-Tex. But mostly determination – **Christian Leary**

TWITTER
http://twitter.com/mbukmagazine

Best new trails you've ridden this year?

Blade at Afan. Love it! – **@amytmtb**

North Nibley, Isle of Purbeck, oh, and Haldon Forest too – **@attacktrail**

It has to be Cafall (Cwmcarn). Best new trail built for ages – **@halfwayupMTB**

The classic Elan Valley loop – amazing! **@TrailspottingUK**

INSTAGRAM
http://instagram.com/mbukmagazine



@chr15 and his mates enjoy a proper hike-a-bike, Lake District style



We're loving the water transfer graphics on this **@orangebikes** Alpine 160

CHRISTMAS GIFT GUIDE



CUSTOM O.S. MAPS

1 Ordnance Survey Custom Made maps are the ideal present for anyone who loves the great outdoors. Choose the centre point, upload a cover photo and add a personalised title to create a unique gift. Custom Made maps cost **£16.99** with free delivery, or **£25.99** for a special Christmas bundle with compass and map case. Head over to **www.oscustommade.co.uk** for more information.

MUC-OFF CLEANING PRODUCTS

2 Struggling to find bundle gifts or stocking fillers? Look no further! Muc-Off's range of bicycle and rider care products will keep both you and your bike glistening throughout the festive period and beyond. Don't let the weather stop you, just get out and ride! Prices range from **£6 to £60**. Find out more at **www.muc-off.com**.

PLAIN LAZY TEE

3 Everyone's a Tour winner with this 100 per cent cotton T-shirt from Plain Lazy, the UK-based lifestyle brand whose ethos is to relax, have fun and enjoy life. The tee costs **£22** and is designed and printed in the UK. Check out the brand and products at **www.plainlazy.com**.

VELOVAULT BIKE BOX

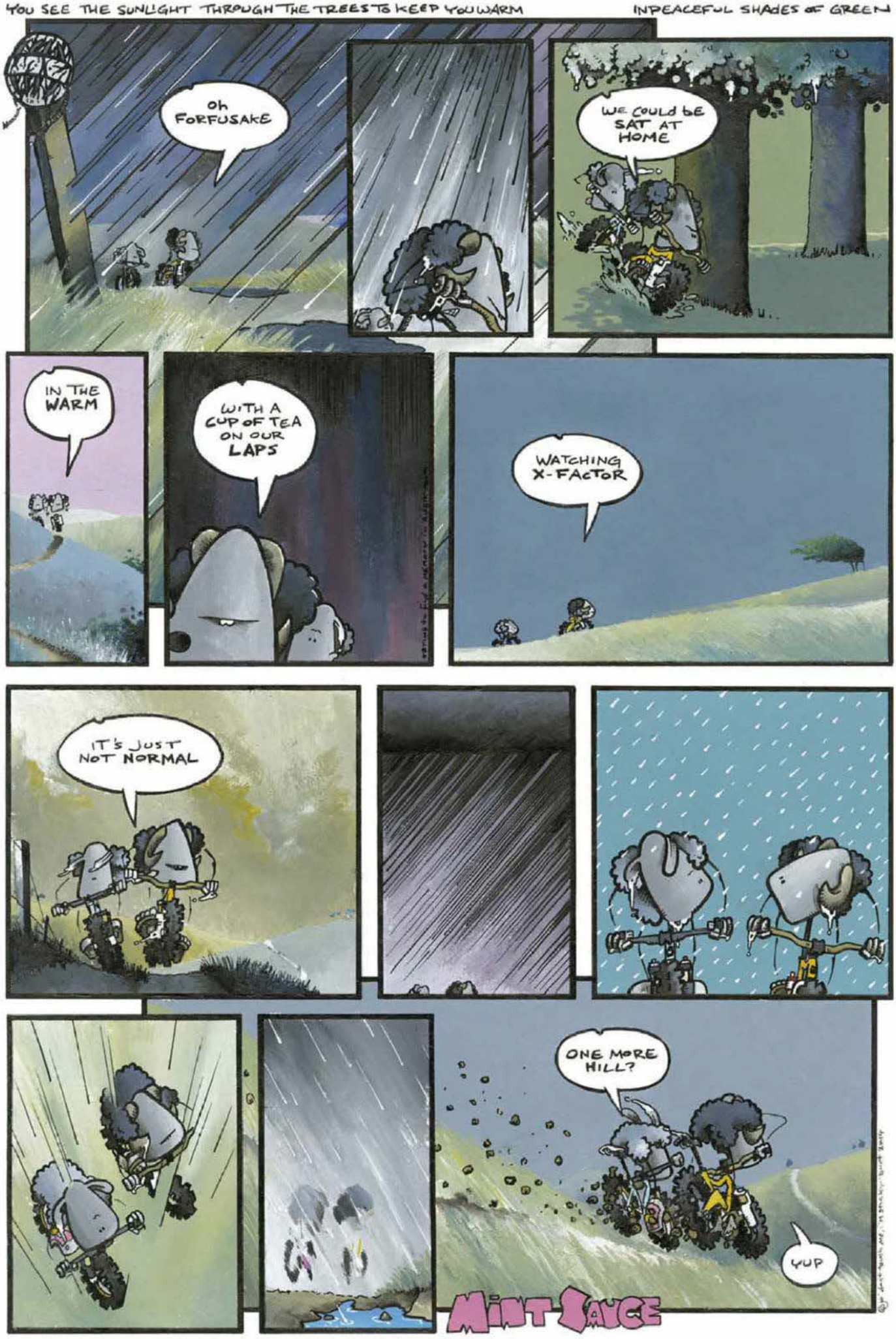
4 Available in black, orange, red or pink, the VeloVault is the only UK-made rigid bike box that's compatible with all wheel sizes, including 29in. With self-locating support struts, lockable catches and impact-resistant foam padding, it'll transport your bike in safety and style. The VeloVault costs **£449** but you can claim **£25 off** using the code MBUK025 at **www.velovault.cc**. It's a win/win present that's going to earn you big brownie points!










YOU SEE THE SUNLIGHT THROUGH THE TREES TO KEEP YOU WARM
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IN THE WARM
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WATCHING X-FACTOR
IT'S JUST NOT NORMAL
ONE MORE HILL?
YUP
MINT SAUCE



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MBUK FirstRides

FEATURING: Specialized Stumpjumper EVO 29 // Nukeproof Mega TR // Intense Tracer T275



Spec changes have made the Stumpy EVO better than ever



The carbon frame and cranks help keep overall weight below 13kg

SPECIALIZED STUMPJUMPER EVO 29

FRAME FACT 9m carbon fibre front triangle, M5 alloy rear end, 135mm (5.3in) travel **FORK** RockShox Pike RC, 140mm (5.5in) travel **SHOCK** Fox Float CTD Factory BV w/ Autosag **DRIVETRAIN** SRAM X01 w/ S2200 cranks **WHEELSET** Roval Traverse Fattie 29 wheels, Specialized Butcher Control (F) and Slaughter Control (R) 29x2.3in tyres **BRAKES** Shimano Deore XT **BAR/STEM** Specialized XC, 750mm/Specialized XC, 60mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** Specialized Command Post IR/Specialized Henge Comp **WEIGHT** 12.37kg/27.27lb (M, without pedals) **PRICE** £4,600 (complete bike) **CONTACT** Specialized www.specialized.com

The Stumpjumper FSR Expert Carbon EVO 29, to give it its full name, is one of our favourite big-wheeled trail bikes of recent years. The frame remains the same for 2015, but will spec changes make it even better?

The frame

The clean, swooping lines and low-slung top tube of the FACT 9m carbon front triangle mean plenty of standover room. Coupled with the relatively low 335mm BB height, this lowers the Stumpy's centre of mass, making it feel confident in the turns. The stout tapered head tube is just 100mm long on the medium frame, stopping the bar height getting too lofty. The M5 alloy rear end uses Spesh's four-bar FSR layout, with a pivot on the chainstay and a shock shuttle driving the Fox Float CTD damper, which controls an ample 135mm (5.3in) of rear wheel travel.

The kit

While SRAM's hard-to-fault X01 11-speed drivetrain thankfully remains, Specialized have switched the Stumpy over to Shimano's super-consistent XT brakes for 2015. The internally routed Command Post also gets Spesh's new shifter paddle style SLR remote, which we're massive fans of. The key change, though, is to the new Roval Traverse Fattie wheelset. The alloy rims have a 29mm internal width, which not only adds volume to the tyres but offers additional support too, meaning you can run lower pressures for improved traction.

The ride

One of the reasons we like the Stumpy EVO 29 so much is its well-considered proportions, which put you in a fantastic, relatively neutral position on the bike, letting you react to and attack the trail as things unfold in front of you. The chainstays look a little long on paper, but in practice they help create a well balanced ride that's playful enough when it counts but still stable at speed. Add to that the relatively low front end, and we were surprised how well we could weight the front wheel in loose, flat turns.

As you'd expect at this price, the bike is no heavyweight – at just 12kg (27lb) you can rapidly get it up to speed. It doesn't hang around on the climbs either and tackles even steep, awkward gradients in a fret-free fashion. With ample cockpit room, we never found the front wheel lifting when we were grinding up steep stuff either.

Drop into tight, steep, technical terrain and you'll be surprised at just what you can get away with. The composed handling and well-balanced suspension mean you'll want to push way past what you think is appropriate for this kind of bike and makes us wonder if making things a little more progressive out back might be beneficial.

There's slight flex in the big wheels when you're pushing hard, but not enough to make you question line choice, and the wider rims improve comfort and traction. **ROB**

FirstRides RATED

One of our favourite trail 29ers, for good reason. Great geometry and a solid package, but certainly not cheap

★★★★½

FirstRides Ratings

WE BASE OUR SCORES ON VALUE FOR MONEY AND PERFORMANCE

★★★★★ **EXCEPTIONAL:** A genuine class leader

★★★★½ **VERY GOOD:** One of the best you can buy

★★★☆☆ **GOOD:** It'll do the job and do it well

★★☆☆☆ **BELOW AVERAGE:** Flawed in some way

★☆☆☆☆ **POOR:** Simply put, don't bother!





↑ The Mega TR is often overlooked in favour of the AM but it's lighter and more versatile

↓ A mix of SRAM's superb X01 and X1 kit takes care of shifting and pedalling duties



NUKEPROOF MEGA TR 275 PRO

FRAME 6061-T6 aluminium, 130mm (5in) travel **FORK** RockShox Revelation RCT3, 150mm (5.9in) travel **SHOCK** RockShox Monarch RT3 DebonAir **DRIVETRAIN** SRAM X01 shifter and rear mech, X1 cranks and cassette **WHEELSET** Nukeproof Generator AM TCS wheels, Schwalbe Magic Mary TrailStar (F) and Rock Razor PaceStar (R) 27.5x2.35in tyres **BRAKES** SRAM Guide RS **BAR/STEM** Nukeproof Warhead, 760mm/Nukeproof Warhead, 50mm **POST/SADDLE** RockShox Reverb Stealth/Nukeproof AM **WEIGHT** 13.72kg/30.25lb (M, without pedals) **PRICE** £2,999.99 (complete bike) **CONTACT** Hotlines www.hotlines-uk.com

Nukeproof's formidable yet sometimes overlooked Mega TR has always been a great bike for those looking to explore new trails and have fun on the way. For 2015, it retains the hard-hitting edge we've come to love, but gets aesthetic refinements and an updated spec that should unlock even more of its potential. We hit the trails on the top-of-the-range Mega TR Pro at its launch in Spain to find out for ourselves.



↑ Nukeproof's Erosion Link drives a Monarch RT3 shock with the new DebonAir sleeve

The frame

Beneath the TR Pro's matt black finish is a stout, hydroformed 6061-T6 alloy tubeset, beefed up with a 142x12mm rear end and a straight 44mm head tube that'll take a tapered-steerer fork. Nukeproof's Erosion Link suspension system dishes out a comfortably progressive 130mm (5.1in) of travel, and neat cable routing, ISCG-05 tabs and room for a bottle cage round things off nicely.

While the TR shares its silhouette with the longer-travel Mega AM, its lighter tubing adds a touch more versatility. The 67-degree head angle delivers a good balance of cornering agility and descending stability, the sloping top tube provides ample standover room and the steep 73.5-degree seat angle helps maintain front wheel grip when climbing.

The kit

The Pro sits at the top of the three-bike Mega TR range with a spec to match, including a mix of SRAM's superb X01 and X1 transmission kit and Guide RS brakes, Schwalbe's Magic Mary and Rock Razor tyre combo on tubeless-ready rims, a 125mm RockShox Reverb Stealth post, 50mm stem and 760mm bar. Suspension duties are handled by a 150mm (5.9in) travel RockShox Revelation up front and a custom-tuned Monarch RT3 DebonAir shock in the rear.

The ride

The first thing we noticed about the Mega TR was the comfy ride position – for our 5ft 10in tester, the large frame was a near perfect fit. Taller riders may struggle though, because the XL size is only 27mm longer. The next thing that becomes obvious is that, while climbing isn't where the TR really shines, the 32t chainring and wide-range 10-42t cassette, steep seat angle and harder compound rear tyre certainly help proceedings.

It's when you aim the TR downhill that it purrs into life though. This is a bike that begs to be launched off and into the kind of terrain you'd normally only tackle on a longer-travel bike. But when the gradient begins to flatten and these bigger-hitters become too much bike for the task at hand, the TR's shorter travel and snappier geometry help keep things lively and fun.

The Schwalbe rubber and Monarch DebonAir shock ensure it remains composed, no matter what you throw at it, while the Guide brakes, wide bar and short stem provide masses of control, making it a seriously fun ride. **OLLY**

FirstRides RATED

A bike that amplifies the fun factor on everyday rides, with a spec and price to put a smile on anyone's face

★★★★☆

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↑ Despite the XL frame's big seat tower the Intense silhouette is unmistakable

↓ The Renthal cockpit is a good choice, though we'd prefer a wider bar



INTENSE TRACER T275 CARBON

FRAME Carbon fibre, 145-160mm (5.7-6.3in) travel **FORK** RockShox Pike RCT3, 160mm (6.3in) travel **SHOCK** RockShox Monarch Plus RC3 High Volume **DRIVETRAIN** SRAM X1 w/ X01 mechs and XX1 chain **WHEELSET** Stan's NoTubes ZTR Flow EX Team 27.5 wheels, Maxxis High Roller 3C MaxTerra EXO 27.5x2.3in tyres **BRAKES** Shimano Deore XT **BAR/STEM** Renthal Fatbar Lite Carbon, 740mm/ Renthal Duo, 50mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** RockShox Reverb Stealth/Intense Sacred Heart **WEIGHT** 13.22kg/29.15lb (XL, without pedals) **PRICE** £2,799.99 (frame only) **CONTACT** Extra UK www.extrauk.co.uk

It's not cheap, but the carbon Tracer saves a ton of weight over the metal version and it's an addictively involving and charismatically dynamic enduro entertainer.

The frame

The T275 Carbon follows the typical Intense template, with the hunchback front end, braced top tube, subtly S-curved down tube and asymmetric-stayed swingarm joined by two VPP linkages all mirroring their metal bikes. In fact, the T275 Alloy uses exactly the same tube shapes and geometry. But even with thick down tube armour, the Full Mountain Carbon lay-up saves a dramatic 1.15kg (2.54lb) in weight. Internal control and dropper post routing, chain guide mounts, a 142x12mm rear axle and grease-ported bearings complete the fixtures list. Keep an eye on those bearings though – the rear end can come loose quickly if they're not nipped up right.



↑ The VPP (Virtual Pivot Point) rear end's uniquely interactive feel won't suit everybody

The kit

Intense's new complete bike options save you some money over buying a frame and doing a DIY build with full-price parts. The Pro Build package pairs RockShox's outstanding Pike fork with their Monarch Plus shock to create a totally balanced control team. The SRAM X1/X01 transmission, Shimano XT brakes, Maxxis High Roller 3C tyres and Renthal cockpit are great performers too, though a wider Fatbar than the 'Lite' version specced would match the XL frame size better. The Stan's Flow wheels are light but strong and broad enough to handle fat tyres, though the loose axle spacers are a pain.

The ride

The carbon frame, light wheels and noticeable tightening of the VPP suspension under power make for healthy acceleration despite the T275's 160mm (6.3in) of travel. If you're a fan of direct feedback between the rear wheel and pedals, it helps you tune torque to available traction. It also lifts the BB a tad for extra pedal clearance.

The downside is a lot of bob and pedal tug if you're trying to grunt a gear along at low revs but don't want to flick the shock into pedal mode. You'll also get a real tug back through the pedals if you slap the wheel into a big block or landing. Stay off the gas though, and the rearward axle path of the long lower link and the high-volume shock mean those same blocks vanish without trace.

The long, slack geometry makes for surefooted corner carving as soon as you get the big side knobs biting. The Pike fork and Monarch shock work superbly in tandem too, with loads of traction and supple response but plenty of stability in the mid stroke that keeps things consistent when turning or braking hard. If you really push the bike through the turns or when turning the pedals there's noticeable flex through the linkages and back end. It's never enough to unsettle the super-stiff front though, and if you like a bike that involves you rather than isolating you from the ride, it's a genuinely Intense experience. **GUY**

FirstRides RATED

Light, responsive and seriously big-hit capable, but expensive, maintenance needy and suspension feel won't suit all

★★★½☆

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MBUK

First Look

Tasty bits of new kit to get excited about



KINGDOM BIKE HEX

Handcrafted from 3Al-2.5V titanium, and featuring titanium pivot and shock bolts and carbon fibre suspension links, the Hex certainly ticks all the boxes when it comes to using the most expensive materials available. This 650b-wheeled full-suspension frame from Danish Ti specialists Kingdom Bike has been designed for progressive trail riding, with 145mm (5.7in) of travel, a long top tube and slack 67-degree head angle. Features include a tapered head tube, 142x12mm rear axle and internal dropper post routing. The Hex is available in three sizes and Kingdom offer no fewer than six shock options to help you build your perfect bike. With a claimed frame weight of 3.15kg, our 18in test bike tips the scales at 13.2kg (29.1lb).

£2,250 (frame only) Kingdom Bike www.kingdombike.com



GARMIN FENIX 2 GPS WATCH

WEARABLE TECH IS the future, apparently, so it looks like we'll be seeing more and more of it in mountain biking over the coming years. Garmin's latest GPS sports watch will not only get you home from the trails in time for tea but will track your movements in the middle of nowhere – useful for anyone who gets carried away following trails into the abyss – and allows you to mark useful points on the trail, such as shelters, viewpoints or where the gnarly bits are. It's got an altimeter, compass and an array of other useful functions. What's more, it can connect with your iPhone, allowing you to receive texts, emails and alerts wirelessly while your phone is safely buried in your hydration pack.

£389.99 Madison www.madison.co.uk





TSG DAWN FLEX PISSPOT HELMET

PISSPOT LIDS DESIGNED to soak up multiple hits down at the dirt jumps tend to fall into two camps – hardshell, which prioritise protection, and softshell, which are lighter and more comfy but can come up short should the worst happen. TSG realised they needed to develop a helmet that passed strict CE and CPSC safety tests yet remained comfy... and didn't make the rider look like a mushroom. The Dawn Flex does that by connecting a series of EPS foam segments with a reinforced skeleton, allowing the lid to flex and mould to the rider's head.

£49.99 Ison Distribution www.ison-distribution.com

EVOC ENDURO TOUCH GLOVES

NO MATTER HOW hard you try, it's impossible to avoid the current industry buzzword, 'enduro', right now. It's everywhere, and for good reason too – products that can handle aggressive terrain while being light and comfortable enough for long days in the saddle are a win-win for all of us. And that's exactly what EVOC have produced with their new lightweight Enduro Touch gloves, which feature a one-piece non-wrinkling palm, touchscreen compatible fingers, a snot wipe on the thumb and an extended neoprene wrist closure to keep out the elements.

£31.95 Silverfish www.silverfish-uk.com





RACE FACE SIXC CINCH CRANKSET

MADE IN BRITISH Columbia, the SIXC Cinch is light enough for trail riding yet certified for DH racing, with Race Face claiming it has a strength-to-weight ratio unparalleled among carbon cranksets. The hollow arms are strong enough not to need an internal alloy spine, keeping weight to a minimum (520g for our sample), and the splined 30mm axle is interchangeable, so you can use the arms with a variety of BB types. The cranks are available with a direct-mount narrow/wide ring or you can buy the arms on their own (£389), add a removable spider (£43.95) and run your preferred 2x/3x set-up.

£429 (with direct-mount ring) Silverfish www.silverfish-uk.com

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#48 Steve Smith's Devinci Wilson 27.5



WHY IS THIS A SUPER BIKE?

- The latest evolution of one of the most successful bikes on the DH World Cup circuit, totally redesigned around larger 650b wheels
- As a member of the elite BlackBox development programme, Stevie has access to SRAM's top-tier products, made to measure and tailored to his needs on the race track
- This is a 'factory' bike with custom colours/graphics and a plethora of awesome modifications to improve performance courtesy of Stevie's mechanic, Nigel Reeve

Back with a vengeance

Is this the bike that could help Stevie Smith reclaim his World Cup crown?

After four months off the bike with a broken ankle, reigning World Cup downhill champ Stevie Smith returned to the fray on the hallowed slopes of Fort William with a new prototype frame between his legs. Incredibly, the 'Canadian Chainsaw Massacre' missed the podium by just one place, showing he was well on the way back to his hard-charging best and proving the new Devinci Wilson 27.5's race-winning potential.

Stevie's 650b wonder

While this new carbon bike shares its name and Split Pivot suspension design with the old Wilson and boasts a similarly purposeful silhouette, it's an all-new machine, designed from the ground up to capitalise on the performance benefits of 650b wheels. But with Stevie enjoying such success on the 26in bike, the Canadian company were keen not to ruin a good thing. "The challenge was to create a bike that was as good or even better than the Wilson 26," says Devinci's marketing manager, David Régnier-Bourque. "The frame design is quite different, increasing space for the »

Words Olly Forster **Pics** Nathan Carvell



WHO IS STEVIE SMITH?

This 25-year-old from Vancouver Island not only won the overall World Cup title in 2013 but half the races too. This year didn't go so well – a pre-season injury saw the 'Canadian Chainsaw Massacre' miss the first two races, then another crash at Mont-Sainte-Anne put paid to his World Champs hopes – but the moustachioed Cannuck will be gunning for the win in 2015.

WORK IN PROGRESS

Stevie's frame was a prototype – the production Wilson 27.5 looks set to have an extra supporting strut on the non-driveside seatstay.

MADE FOR SPEED

The new Wilson comes in sizes from S to XL and sports a slack 63.2-degree head angle, a ground-hugging 348mm BB height and fun-loving 435mm chainstays.

WHERE'S THE PIVOT?

Dave Weagle's Split Pivot suspension system is designed to separate acceleration forces from braking forces by placing the main pivot concentric with the rear wheel axle. It's a design found on all of the Canadian company's full-sussers.

SILENT OPERATOR

Stevie's mechanic Nigel is a dab hand when it comes to making bikes silent and deadly – check out the 3M mastic tape strategically applied to the stays and chain guide.

QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

SRAM's X01 DH transmission combines the chain-hugging X-SYNC chainring and clutch rear mech of their 1x11 systems with a seven-speed cassette that offers gear ratios specifically chosen for downhill racing.

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Robin Weaver, Senior Technical Editor, *MBUK*



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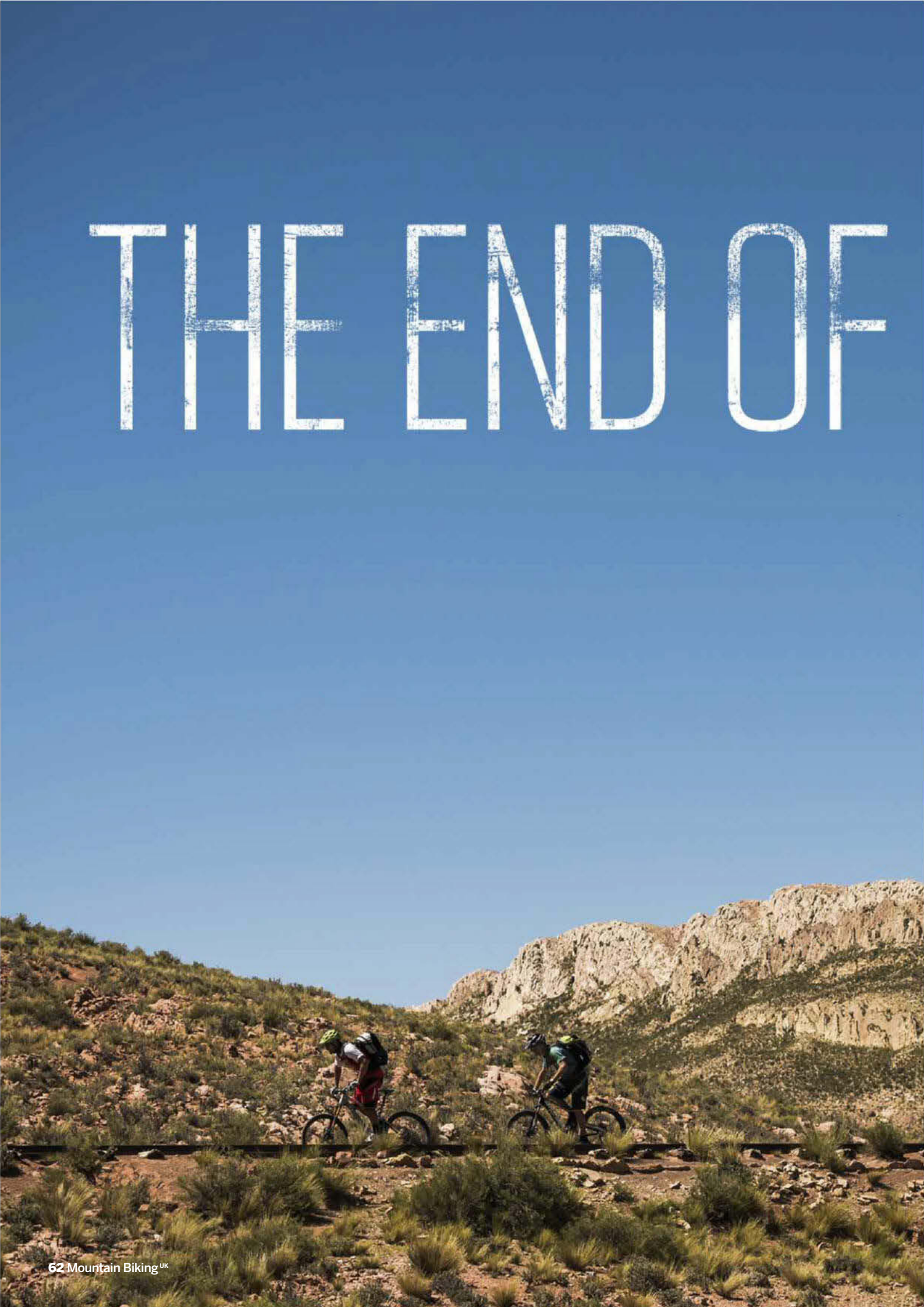


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THE END OF



THE LINE?

When does a railroad become a mountain bike trail? When it's a disused 100-year-old line through the Argentine desert... »

Words and pics Dan Milner





At least navigation wasn't too much of a worry!



The landscape was a geologist's wet dream in parts



A head for heights would have been an invaluable asset

Now I'm not boasting, but when I look down I'm not used to seeing such a big space between my legs. Right now there's a gaping hole dropping away into space, right where I want to put my foot. My right forearm is cramping from my death-grip hold on the bike and my legs are shaking uncontrollably. And to top it off there's a gusting wind blowing across the old bridge I'm trying to cross. Who'd have thought riding along an old railway line would be such a challenge?

The 50m-long bridge spans a gorge, in which a brown slither of river flows 100m below. It's one of two bridges I knew would present serious challenges during our attempt to ride 100km along a 100-year-old railway line through Argentina's northern desert. In the absence of either footpath or hand rail, getting across the bridge means stepping between unevenly spaced railway sleepers and trying not to let occasional missing sleepers freak me out.

Riding the abandoned Belgrano Norte railway is an idea I've had for a while. I spotted its potential for adventure six years ago while in the region on another mountain bike trip. Then, from the comfort of a rental car, I eyed the bridges' towering steel structures and the old railway artefacts with an air of romance.

Ticket to adventure

Cutting a line of least resistance between two points, railways sound like they'd make rubbish mountain biking. But when the line hasn't been used for two decades, getting from A to B becomes a little more uncertain. Using it as a base for exploring Northern Argentina's spectacular high-altitude desert landscape, surrounded by 5,000m peaks, a 100km ride along this line would be pure adventure, I convinced myself.

Adventure is the key word here, and I remind myself of that as I sit in a cafe in the one-horse town of La Quiaca with Hans Rey, Tibor Simai and Rob Summers. After three days of travel to get here, we're tired, hungry and grumpy. The stale cakes we're being served aren't helping. A stone's throw away sits the Bolivian border, the far side of an ugly concrete bridge, and behind us the start of our railway line, a ribbon of rusting rails that runs for 700km south to the city of Salta.

"It's the crappiest trail I've ever seen," says Hans. It's quite an accolade considering that during Hans's three decades of adventure mountain biking, he must have ridden some fairly crappy trails. I put a brave face on it and stress the adventure side of what we're about to do. Secretly, I can't help but agree with Hans though.

We pay for a pickup truck the next morning to take us to the little town of Abra Pampa to begin our ride. With 40km to cover to reach our day's destination of Tres Cruces, we're feeling a mix of enthusiasm, confidence and anxiety. Who knows what lies ahead – after all, nobody has ridden this line before. There's one thing we're sure of though, and it's in our favour – railway lines are never steep and ours should make for a relatively easy pedal. It's a naive idea. We ride straight into an unrelenting 20km climb at 3,500m altitude. Gasping for oxygen and hammered by a steady headwind, our pace is painfully slow.

For the next two days this will be our 'trail', hemmed in on each side by rusting rails that have twisted and bent in the desert heat. Obstinate llamas, broken bridges and wild undergrowth drive us off the railway at times, so we have to roll down its »

My forearm is cramping from my death-grip hold on the bike and my legs are shaking uncontrollably

DRINK UP!

HYDRATE OR DIE

Riding a desert epic presents unique challenges. Here's how the guys survived to tell the tale:

1. Hydration is key. A five per cent decrease in your body's water content can lead to a 30 per cent loss in muscle efficiency. We aimed to drink 0.3l every half hour during sustained activity.

2. Supplements like Clif Shot Electrolyte Hydration Drink helped our bodies retain water better.

3. Where possible we tried to inhale and exhale through our noses rather than our mouths. Panting is for dogs!

4. Adding a bottle cage to a bike might be out of fashion, but it allowed us to carry extra water without feeling the weight. Most frames can accommodate at least one 750ml bottle.

5. Carrying a portable water filter, such as one of Katadyn's ceramic pump filters, can mean the difference between running dry and being able to safely refill water bottles from a river or stream anywhere. It's a simple, effective and lightweight solution that's got us out of trouble in every corner of the globe.



An old truck was never such a welcome sight – shade!

embankment, and wire fences force us off the bikes. Bridges above dry creekbeds become a test of nerves to ride. With enough momentum you can cross them, but the possibility of a missing sleeper means each needs to be evaluated first, before backing up for a run-up.

By mid morning it's clear the heat and sunburn will take their toll. There's no shade so when we stop for a snack we've no option but to remain at the mercy of the sun, our bikes and packs strewn across the railway. The mercury is pushing 32°C. Thankfully, as we get into our stride the riding becomes easier. Sagebrush sprouts from the rails in such a way that it forms a snaking line of singletrack to weave along. The wind has long since buried the sleepers in sand, and now baked hard it makes a good riding surface. Even Hans is admitting this is more fun than he'd imagined, and inwardly I'm agreeing.

Full steam ahead

We roll past isolated farms and between towering outcrops of red rock. In the distance is the hum of Highway 9, the only paved road in the region, heading north to the Bolivian border. It's the same story here as around the world – the rise of the car paralleling the demise of the railway. There's talk of reopening this line to cater for the growing numbers of tourists capitalising on Argentina's weak currency, but as we make our way along its course it's obvious that such a project would be a massive and unlikely undertaking. In many places the sleepers have gone altogether, washed away by river floods or removed by locals to use as scarce building materials.

Our slow climb tops out at 3,700m by a hillside cemetery, its cluster of iron crosses strewn with colourful ribbons and garish plastic flowers. We roll past scattered animal bones bleached white by the sun and into a gentle but appreciated descent towards Tres Cruces. Around us the red, pink and orange hillsides are folded into a geologist's dreamscape, and we can pick out a singletrack trail climbing up towards a cleft in the rockface.

Our railway now becomes an access trail for finding new terrain, and we jump the rails to immerse ourselves in some decent singletrack riding. The trail we spotted isn't long, but climbing and descending it gives us the buzz we all need to finish the day. By the time we roll into the tiny village of Tres Cruces it's not far off dark.

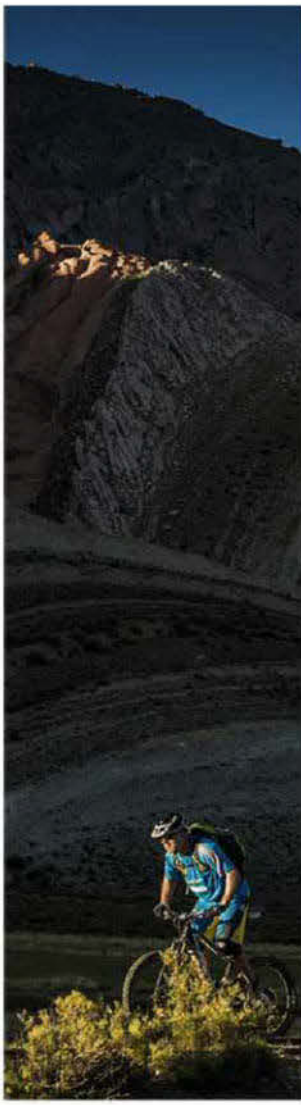
Researching this adventure, I spent hours poring over Google Earth and flipping through a dog-eared Lonely Planet guidebook. When the railway was in full swing, the tiny villages along the railway offered hotels and restaurants. Now, with a fast asphalt road nearby and the railway eerily silent, they've become ghost towns. With Tres Cruces we've taken a gamble on accommodation and when the only hotel we're directed to turns out to be closed, we're left to consider our options. We either rough it in one of the disused railway carriages that sit idle near the station or we jump a ride back to Abra Pampa for the night.

Llama dung

Packing light, we're not carrying sleeping bags or a stove, and the thought of a -10°C night spent burning llama dung for warmth in the back of an old cattle truck isn't swinging it. So we flag down a bus, pile our bikes into its luggage hold and head back to our start point for the night. The next morning a $40 pickup truck ride delivers us back to Tres Cruces.

There's no denying that we're riding in a hostile environment – the desiccated corpse of a llama reminds us of that. Even the railway, once a solid statement of man's ability to tame the wild, has fallen prey to the elements. Slowly but

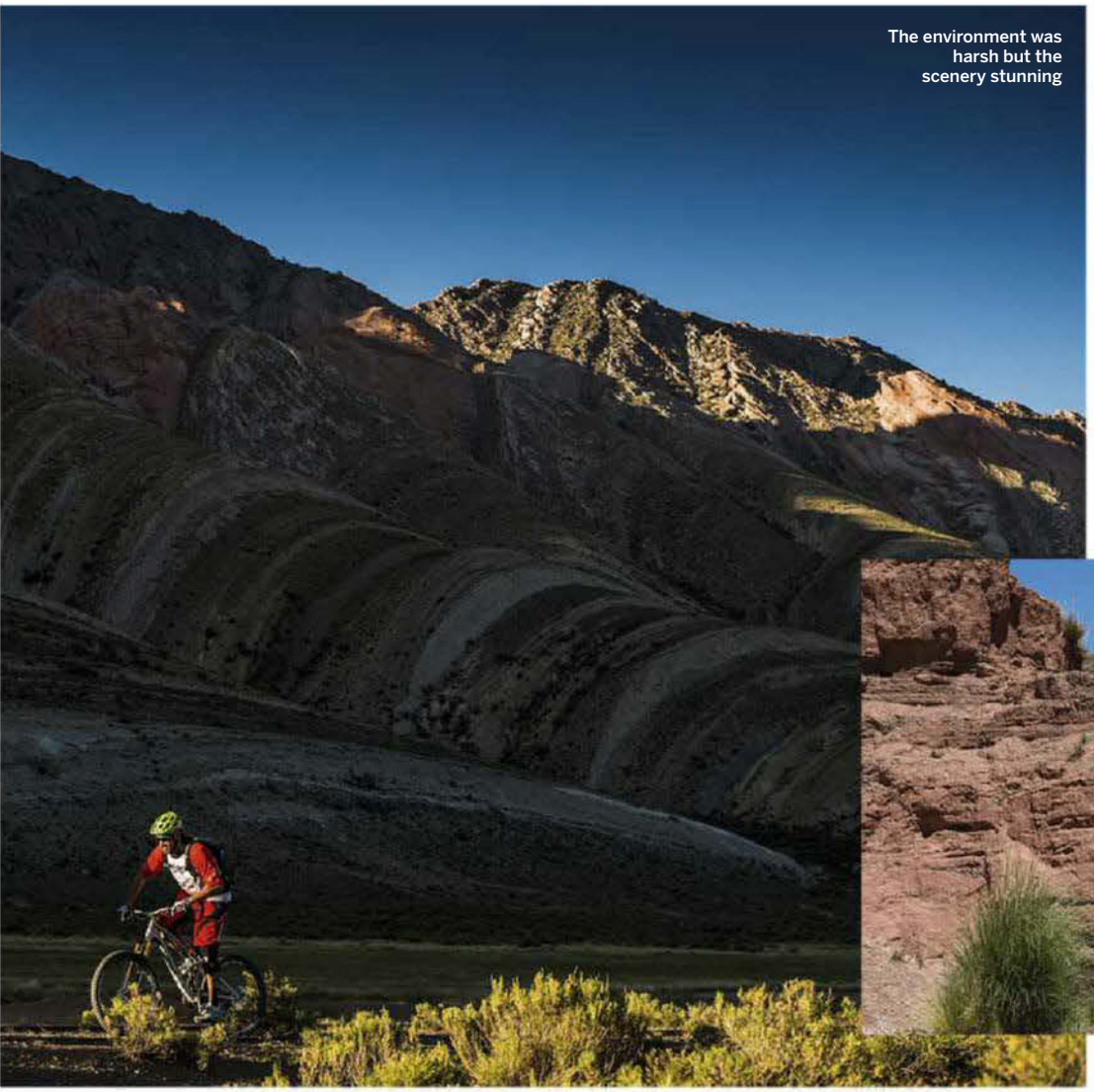
Broken sections of rail and protruding sleepers become a playground for Hans's trials skills





We dined in all the best places...


Tibor feels the need to get vertical after all those rail tracks



The environment was harsh but the scenery stunning

END OF THE LINE

WHAT'S THIS RAILROAD ALL ABOUT THEN?

Completed in 1912 by British engineers, the Belgrano Norte railway line was once the safest and quickest way to cross this mountainous landscape infested with bandits. Its 1m gauge rails carried steam trains to the Bolivian border through a region rich with mining exploits. At its southern end it connected to other lines that spread across to the northern jungles and to the Argentine capital, Buenos Aires. Economic hardship in a region that was already notably poor led to the demise of the railway, and after a period of failing privatisation it closed in 1992. Today its path is still visible from Highway 9 and its old stations and bridges are a living museum of a bygone era.



We scout out some sweet singletrack off to the side of the railway

surely, this ageing industrial artefact is being swallowed up by nature. The abandoned station at Tres Cruces is crumbling, the old switching gear and signals rusting away, and telegraph poles along the railway embankment have become nesting sites for weaver birds.

Mind the gap

We roll away from Tres Cruces early, getting a jump on the heat of the day. We have 60km to ride to reach our goal, the indigenous Andean Indian town of Humahuaca. A gentle downhill helps us cover ground but as interesting terrain to the side appears on our radar we can't help but deviate off the rails for a play.

A steep gully lures Tibor and Hans to climb it, and we're certain it's the first time this scree slope has felt the caress of mountain bike tyres. A little later, broken sections of rail and aggressively protruding sleepers become a playground for Hans's legendary trials skills.

At lunchtime we stop in the only bit of shade we'll find all day – a remote abandoned railway carriage, sitting serenely in the middle of a vast expanse of nothing. We suck on hydration reservoirs that are already running dangerously low and finish our Clif Bar rations, before setting off towards the distant forms of the two towering ironwork bridges.

Holding our nerves while crossing these bridges is paramount. One slip and you could lose a bike between the irregularly spaced sleepers... or worse. Ahead of us we still have a further 30km to ride that day, an afternoon that'll see us reach the bustling cobbled streets of Humahuaca as the sun is setting. Then we'll pop open more than one bottle of decent Argentine wine and devour local stews of quinoa and yams. We'll look back over the past two days and get a chance to reflect on what we've accomplished, where our bikes have taken us and what they've let us see and experience, all way outside the pages of any guidebook. It'll be an adventure that none of us regrets. But for now, I need to focus. There's a gaping gap between my legs. It's an issue that needs to be addressed.

THE RAILROAD CREW

WHO THE HECK ARE HANS REY, TIBOR SIMAI AND DAN MILNER?

Swiss born, USA adopted GT rider Hans Rey is probably the longest working pro mountain biker in history. Once MTB trials world champion, his riding has turned towards adventure trips to every corner of the planet. German ex-BMX national champ and now Canyon pro Tibor is new to adventure mountain biking, but his bodybuilder physique means little is likely to get in his way now he's developed a taste for it. Long-term *MBUK* lensman Dan Milner is an award-winning Brit born photographer who's developed a reputation and taste for the more 'out there' adventure trips.

ADVERTISING FEATURE

JOIN THE FRONT OF THE Q?

HOW AN OVALISED QRING COULD WORK FOR YOU



Rotor Bike Components are a company founded in engineering solutions and they supply many top teams and pro riders on the world cycling scene with their range of innovative chainrings, cranks and bottom brackets, among other things.

One of Rotor's latest products causing a stir is their Qring – an ovalised chainring built with greater pedalling efficiency in mind. It's a concept many mountain bikers aren't necessarily familiar with, but an idea that's firmly rooted in engineering history.

A hundred years ago, mechanical engineers understood that because of our human biomechanics, round chainrings weren't the optimum way to transfer power to the rear wheel. Many attempts at ovalisation were attempted but the extra cost, skills and the fixed nature of the gearing years ago meant that the oval idea never properly took off.

Then in the 1990s a Spanish graduate engineer with access to CNC machining technology worked on some theories to help make transferring our leg power to the drivetrain as efficient as possible – and the idea of elliptical chainrings was born. This was then superseded by the Qring – the first symmetrical, adjustable elliptical chainring.

Early adopters were soon demanding to try these Qrings, among them Christoph Sauser and the late Burry Stander of the Specialized Factory Team, who realised the potential gains and rode them to victories in 2008 and later at the Cape Epic. From there, Rotor developed the 3D MTB crankset, which has since progressed into the Rex cranks (see opposite).

Today we see Qrings specced by pro teams and individual riders, and although sponsorship dictates much of what happens on the race scene, Rotor President Ignacio Estelles is keen to point out that when Rotor sponsor a team, the riders always have the choice to ride Q or non-Q rings and it's never dictated to them. If they choose them, it's because they deem them beneficial – it's as simple as that.

ARE THEY JUST FOR PROS?

You shouldn't assume that because you're not a pro, you're not good enough to use Qrings. In fact, in a lot of cases the opposite can be true. Most 'everyday' mountain bikers have a less efficient pedalling style because they don't spend endless hours training and finessing their technique like the pros. And that's where the benefits of Qrings can come into play, instantly tidying up a messy pedalling action and maintaining maximum efficiency when a rider is tired and struggling.

HOW DO QRINGS WORK?

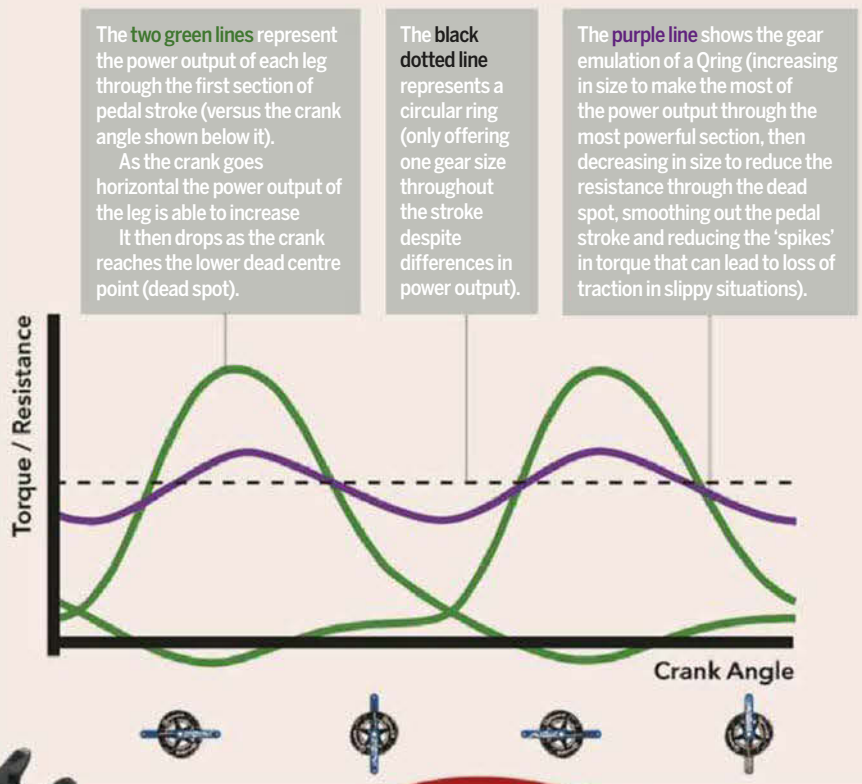
The theory behind ovalisation is that the gear you're pushing is effectively changing throughout the pedalling action.

So, a round 33t chainring offers you the resistance of 33 teeth at every point in your pedal rotation. But our legs don't work like that, so pedalling becomes hard work at the top of the stroke (the dead spot) and at our strongest part of the stroke we only have 33t to push against.

Compare this to a Qring, which changes the dead spot resistance to an effective 31t and offers 35.5t for you to push against at your strongest part of the stroke.

Rotor say this results in a smoother pedal stroke, with many riders – especially stronger, heavier ones – seeing much benefit from the increase in effective tooth size, which results in most riders riding a cog lower at the back within a few weeks.

Qrings can feel strange at first but a choice of fitting holes means they can be tuned in to your pedalling style, with settings for different saddle positions and pedalling cadences.





HOW ARE MTB QRINGS DIFFERENT?

Rotor have developed a narrow/wide single ring that uses a larger ovalisation of 12.5% (it's normally 10% on a road bike Qring). This really helps the rider feel powerful at the strongest point and put the power down with less gear changing and fewer stall points when the going gets tough. These QX1 Qrings can be retrofitted to SRAM X0 or XX cranks with a spider upgrade. Alternatively, Rotor's new Rex cranks (pictured) are a stiff and lightweight option.

HOW DO I TRY QRINGS?

These high-precision Spanish made competition chainrings are machined with ramps and pins to help shifting and come as part of Rotor's 30-day 'Try it' money-back campaign, which can be accessed via any of the company's premier dealers. Since Rotor launched this scheme three years ago, thousands of riders have taken advantage of it and now fit Qrings to their bikes.

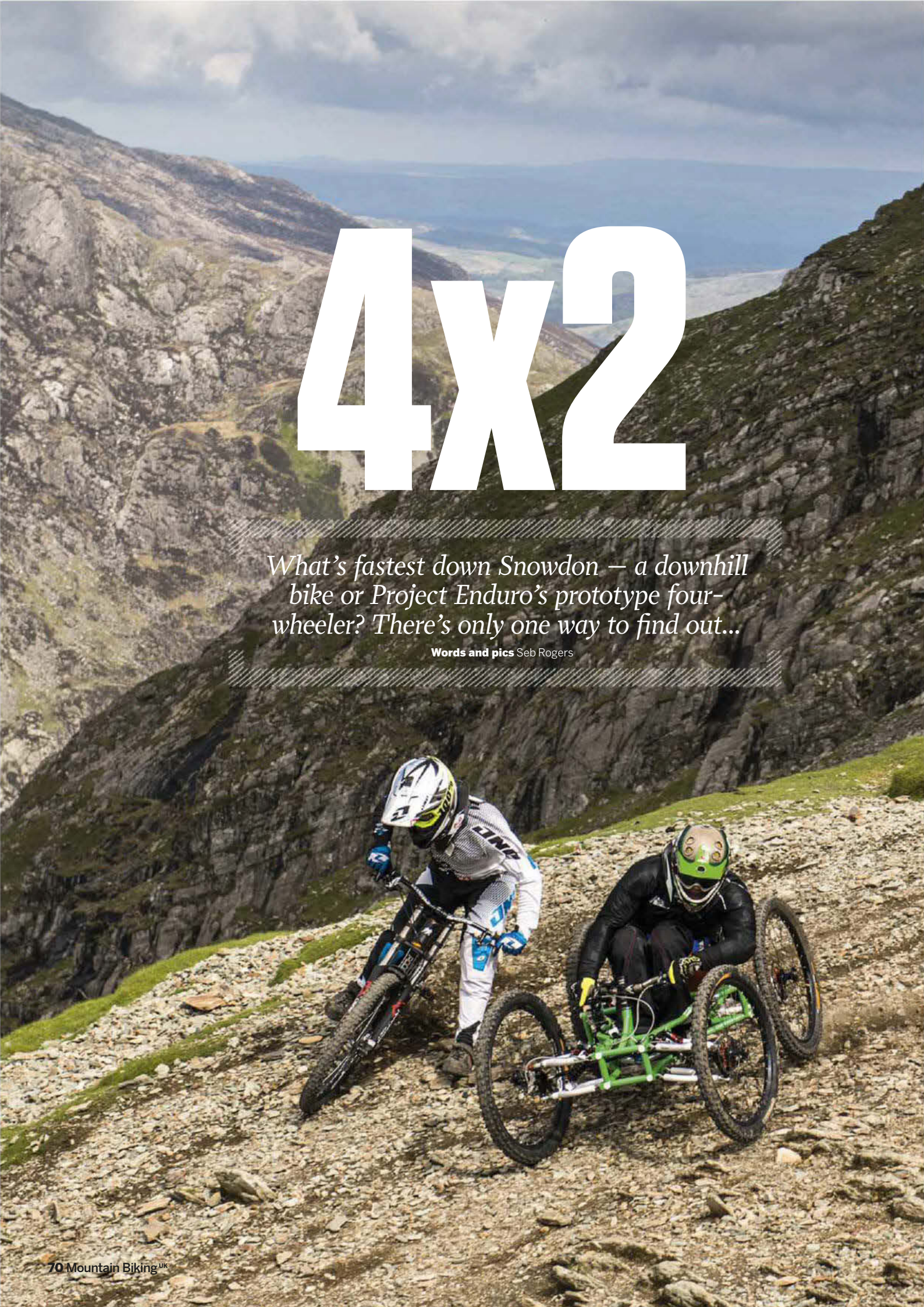
Rotor have expanded to supply their entire portfolio from factory units in Madrid and now offer single and double Qring mountain bike cranksets, plus the rings can be retrofitted to all cranks on the market. The Rex range of cranks from Rotor starts at £199 for the Rex double, with the Rex single cranks at £230 and 460g. Qrings start at £75 for the singlespeed version.

Contact your local Rotor premier dealer for details of the 30-day money-back scheme. For listings, visit **www.rotoruk.co.uk**.

4x2

What's fastest down Snowdon — a downhill bike or Project Enduro's prototype four-wheeler? There's only one way to find out...

Words and pics Seb Rogers





Handily, there's a train that goes up to the summit of Snowdon



Not too shabby a view from the top!

Not far from the top of Snowdon's Llanberis track – the wide, sometimes steep and occasionally insanely rocky path that runs from the edge of Llanberis village to the summit of Wales's highest peak – there's a bit where the mountain starts to slope away from you. This part of the track is relatively smooth and, on a bike, potentially very fast indeed – if you've got the balls – because the gradient gradually increases in a way that means you can never quite see what it is you're riding into.

Phil and Emyr clearly have the balls. Even from a distance, we can see Phil leaning forward in his seat, holding the handlebar with one hand and driving the rear wheel of his four-wheeler with his other to gain speed – his only way of propelling the bike other than hitching a free ride with gravity. Emyr's right next to him on his two-wheeled downhill rig, out of the saddle and sprinting for all he's worth. There's not a lot in it.

As the pair approach the point where we've stopped to wait for them, Emyr launches off a rock that forms a perfect natural kicker in the middle of the trail. For a brief moment it looks for all the world as though he's suspended in mid-air above Phil's bike, as the four-wheeler bounces and swerves through the rocky section. Then Emyr's back on terra firma with a skerf of rubber on loose rock, and the pair disappear out of sight below us, locked in a friendly battle to see who'll be the first under the railway bridge about 800m down the trail.

A couple of walkers who've stopped to watch pick their jaws up from off the floor. It's hard to blame them – it's not every day you see a four-wheeled mountain bike giving a downhiller a run for his money. In fact, as far as we know, this is the first time a four-wheeler has ever descended Snowdon.

Life changing

Imagine, for a moment, that you've lost the use of your legs, permanently. What's the first thing that comes into your mind? The difficulty you're going to have using the bathroom? How you're going to reach the bar to order a pint down the pub? Or »

Blasting down beside the railway is a helluva lot more fun than the sedate ride up

Emyr launches off a rock as the four-wheeler bounces and swerves through the rocky section. There's not a lot in it



Semi-pro DHer Emyr has to work to keep up with the four-wheeler



The Project Enduro bike reaches insane speeds in Phil's capable hands



Phil had a spinal cord injury in a motorbike accident in 2003, then founded Rough Riderz





possibly, if you're anything like most mountain bikers, what on earth you're going to do to replace the buzz of riding your bike? This is the world that the guys running Project Enduro inhabit. A world where the difficulties faced by riders with limited mobility become just another set of engineering problems to be solved.

Run by the irrepressible Calvin Williams, who temporarily lost the use of his legs after an accident a few years ago, it's a collective of engineers, riders and entrepreneurs whose goal is simple: to design the best four-wheeled, gravity-powered off-road bike. The design will then be passed on to a manufacturer capable of producing it at a price that's realistic and affordable, so that as many riders as possible can get back out there on the trails, even if they're not able to ride a regular bike.

"Back in 2004 I fell off a cliff," explains Calvin. No bikes were involved, but as a fit and active rider it was a life-changing moment for him. "Right at the start, when I was first in hospital, nobody really knew whether I was going to walk again," he says. "It takes a while to absorb that information – that you're going to be changed for life."

Luckily for Calvin, several operations, a lot of physio and a great deal of hard work got his legs working again. But his time in a wheelchair had a profound effect on him. In 2010 his employer, Gower College Swansea, was looking for an innovation that could be developed commercially. Around the same time, Calvin met Phil Hall, founder of disabled riders' club Rough Riderz. He was intrigued by the bikes that Phil and his fellow club members were using, but realised their limitations – chiefly that they weren't being made any more. It was a lightbulb moment, and Project Enduro was born.

Flat-out fast

Snowdon is an opportunity to test Project Enduro's first working prototype in the best way possible – by riding down a real mountain, from top to bottom, flat out. A lot of early testing has been carried out on carefully selected trail centre descents, where groomed surfaces and some help from trail builders make it possible to give the four-wheeler a »

FOUR WHEELS GOOD

ANATOMY OF A FOUR-WHEELER

Great handling, simple design and easy maintenance are all part of Project Enduro's design brief. *MBUK* 308's Superbike featured the second prototype, with a double wishbone suspension set-up all round. The Snowdon descent was completed on the first prototype, which has a simple single-pivot swingarm at the rear.

Previous four-wheeler designs have used smaller wheels up front, but Calvin's team have gone for 26in hoops all round for easier rolling over obstacles. Ground clearance can be an issue, but a sturdy bashplate keeps both bike and rider safe from the worst impacts. Part gravity bike, part wheelchair and part off-road go-kart, it defies easy categorisation. The one thing everyone who's tried it agrees on, though, is that it's a blast.

You can keep up with Project Enduro's progress on Facebook, and if you're a regular at the Forest of Dean, you might catch them there – it's where a lot of their prototype testing happens.



Phil rips down the trail, getting airborne off the water bars

straightforward run to the bottom. But nothing about riding down a proper mountain is straightforward. And that's the whole point – this is a real challenge for the bike.

Mean machine

To up the ante, we've brought along semi-pro downhill racer Emyr Davies to ride alongside Phil. The trouble is, it's hard to prise Emyr away from Phil's four-wheeler. He takes it for a practice run down the steps from the summit cairn to the station cafe, and it's all we can do to persuade him to give it back and get on his own bike.

Calvin looks like he's used to this. Wherever the Project Enduro team go for testing, they're quickly surrounded by riders who want to have a go. Although the four-wheeler is mostly aimed at disabled riders, it will attract attention from able-bodied riders too. The reason is obvious when Phil and Emyr head down the mountain.

You might expect a four-wheeled bike with only gravity to propel it to be slow and ponderous, but it isn't. Well, not in Phil's hands anyway. Whether it's drifting through loose corners, getting airborne off the water bars or generally preventing Emyr from getting away on his downhill rig, by the time we're all back in Llanberis one thing is very clear – Project Enduro is on to a winner. Form an orderly queue...

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

WHERE TO RIDE A FOUR-WHEELER

As you might imagine, the main limiting factor for a four-wheeler is having access (via van) to both the top and bottom of the trail. In the UK, Fort William, Ae Forest, the Forest of Dean, Antur Stiniog, Cwmcarn, Llantrisant, BikePark Wales, Afan Argoed and the Black Mountain Cycle Centre are all tried and tested by Rough Riderz and the Project Enduro team. In Europe, Finale Ligure in Italy and Morzine, Chamonix, Metabief and La Cluzes in France are all options too.

Project Enduro's new bike (which was our Superbike in issue 308) is approved for use on French ski-lifts and gondolas as well as at Fort William, opening up even more possibilities. There's more info on four-wheelers and riding them at **roughriderz.co.uk**.

It's not every day you see a four-wheeled mountain bike giving a downhiller a run for his money



This trail would be gnarly on any bike, let alone with sharp rocks just inches from your undercarriage!

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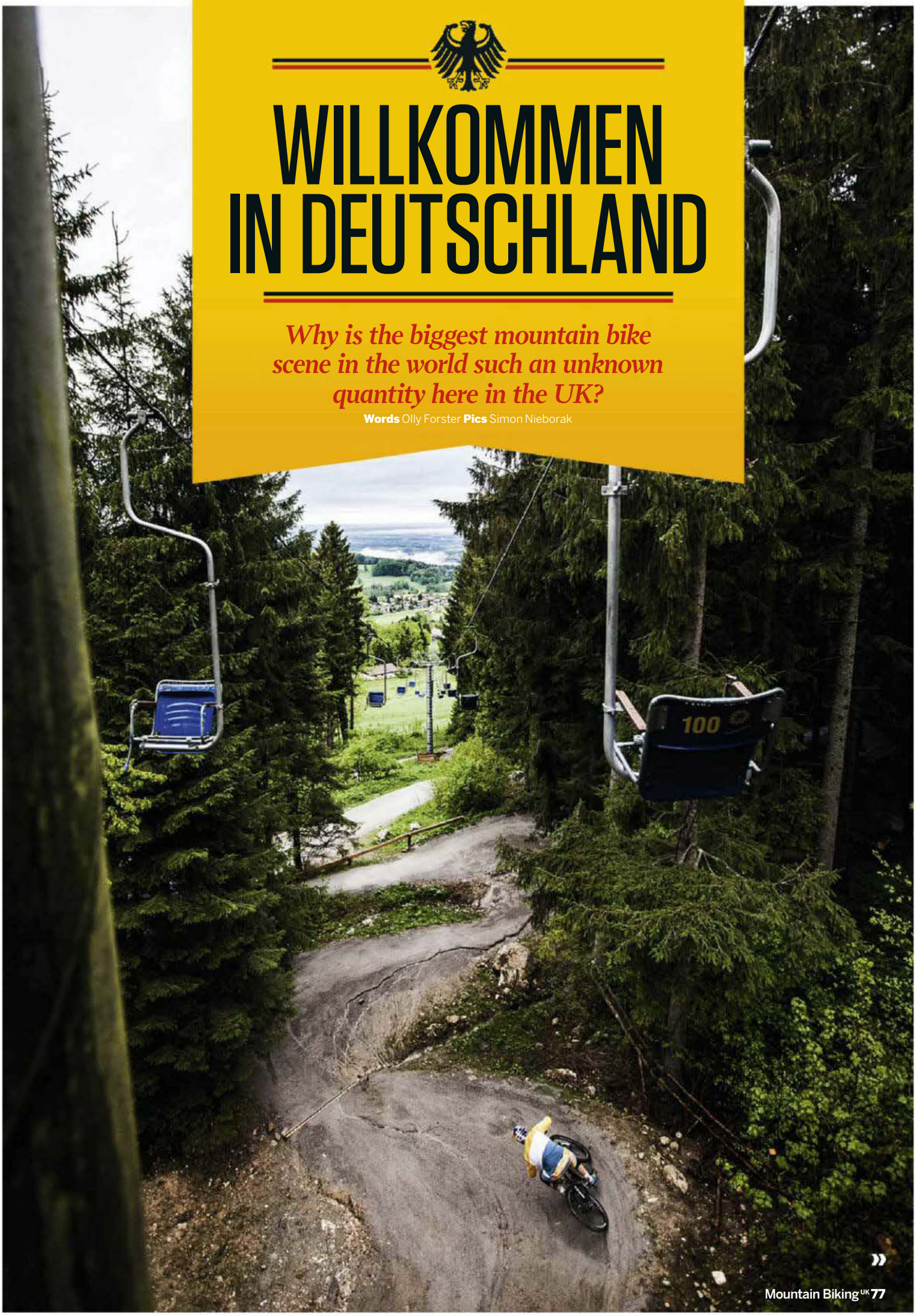
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WILLKOMMEN IN DEUTSCHLAND

Why is the biggest mountain bike scene in the world such an unknown quantity here in the UK?

Words Olly Forster **Pics** Simon Nieborak





The rain doesn't deter Guido Tschugg from throwing some shapes at Samerberg bike park

Despite being the largest mountain bike market in the world, very little is known about the German riding scene outside of its own borders. The country has an extensive network of bike parks, plenty of big home-grown bike brands —including Canyon, Cube, Focus, Ghost and YT Industries — and hosts Eurobike, the world's biggest cycle trade show. So why don't we know more about what goes on there and why aren't we seeing a sea of German riders on the international race scene? We hit the autobahn to find out...

Lay of the land

With just under 138,000 square miles of rolling green hills, thick forests and soaring mountains, Germany's topography is primed for mountain bikes. Add to that the existing winter sports infrastructure in the south and east, and the necessary ingredients for a vibrant and bustling riding scene are all there. The country's trail builders have made good use of all these assets too, delivering a network of professionally run bike parks to complement the off-road trails that have entertained German riders for years. What makes these bike parks unique among Germany's European neighbours is their scale — the country's ski resorts tend to be on the smaller side of things, so rather than French or Swiss style epic alpine descents, we're talking UK style one to two-minute runs, just with a welcome ski lift to take you back to the top again.

All inclusive

The stereotype of the German mountain biker who loves to spend hours in the saddle climbing up forest singletrack only to then hurtle down fireroads has its roots firmly in reality. While many German bikes look a bit dated to us in the UK, with their long stems, narrow bars and steep angles, these features actually suit a

UK VS GERMANY

We might have the best riders in the world, but Germany has the terrain – and easy access to the Alps. Add to that the excellent motorway network and extended summer season (bike parks are generally open longer than in France or Switzerland – from May to October, or even all year round) and you're good to go. Weather is similar to the UK, but with more extremes of temperature in summer and winter. Many Germans speak fluent English, so don't worry about the language barrier. Instead of queues and van-and-trailer uplifts, expect lift-assisted gravity fun for all abilities, making it a perfect place for new riders looking to cut their teeth on downhill riding. Germany is only a two-hour flight away (return flights from £110) but if you want to make the most of your trip, we recommend hitting the autobahn and roadtripping your way around, absorbing the culture as well as the riding on offer.



Marcus Klausmann scrubs a rooty drop in the Bavarian backcountry





Our man Olly gets some tips from the 15-time national champ

great many riders in Germany, and indeed elsewhere in mainland Europe. Many German riders love nothing more than steady cross-country rides in the forests, where they can escape the hustle and bustle of modern life and get out into nature. They'll make use of fireroads to explore what's on offer, sometimes avoiding the singletrack altogether.

This may seem a little back to front to UK riders accustomed to using fireroads to access more technically challenging trails back down to the bottom of the hill. But maybe the Germans have got things right. If we had the same trail access and love for the great outdoors, combined with easier trails that were less offputting for new riders, would mountain biking be bigger here, where everyone and their dog is on a road bike right now?

Even the bike parks in Germany offer something for everyone, with many of them having trails for mixed ages and abilities – sometimes at the expense of more challenging trails – giving riders new to the sport a chance to experience lift-assisted gravity riding without having to point their bike down an intimidating trail designed for downhill racers.

There is a potential flipside to this open and welcoming attitude though. Yes, you end up with a huge scene and all the benefits that brings, but when you ignore the grittier side of mountain biking and focus on beginner-friendliness and fitness rather than adrenaline, do you also get rid of the creativity and competitiveness needed for progression? To find out, we had to speak to the professionals...

Where are all the pros?

If you follow the race or freeride scenes, you'll notice a distinct lack of German riders on the podium at international events. Surely such a large scene should have produced a plethora of talented riders? Talking to native riders and »

THREE TO FOLLOW

The pro riders putting German mountain biking on the map



MARCUS KLAUSMANN
Now a 37-year-old father of three, Klausmann finished second overall in the 1996 World Cup and has claimed 15 national downhill titles. He still competes, including at select World Cups, and is heavily involved with product development for his sponsors, who include Ghost, Schwalbe and Deuter.



GUIDO TSCHUGG
Now retired from professional racing, Tschugg is one of Germany's most successful riders ever, scooping a bronze medal at the 2006 4X World Champs, finishing two World Cup seasons in the top three and even making the cut for Red Bull Rampage, where he finished in the top 20 – no mean feat. Still a brand ambassador for Red Bull and Ghost, he spends his time building trails and riding bikes for fun.



JOHANNES FISCHBACH
'Fischi' has a successful 4X career behind him – he was German champ four times and a regular sight on the World Cup podium – and is currently climbing the ranks of the World Cup downhill circuit, finishing 24th at this year's World Championships.

industry insiders, it seems that the German scene is so large and so strong that you can all to easily carve a professional career without ever leaving the country. When riders do try to break into the international ranks, they find that the depth of talent overseas is just too deep and return home with their tails between their legs, never to race abroad again.

But this wasn't always the case, and is thankfully beginning to change. Back in the 90s, German riders were a strong force on the World Cup downhill circuit, with the likes of Jürgen Beneke and Regina Stiefl racking up the wins alongside the legendary Marcus Klausmann, who still competes professionally. Talking to Marcus, the problems are black and white: "The young riders don't want to get out there and challenge themselves, preferring to stay in Germany and race on the same tracks each year."

Marcus's frustrations were backed up by up-and-coming World Cup talent Johannes Fischbach, who after a successful 4X career has made the transition to DH. "I just wish I'd got into downhill sooner," said the 26-year-old. "I'm racing against riders who've been racing downhill all their lives on the best tracks and you see how hard it is at the World Cups."



Johannes Fischbach sends a double at the community dirt jumps in Waldsassen

Lessons learned

The welcoming and unpretentious approach that reverberates through every facet of mountain biking in Germany has created a thriving scene that encompasses everything from riders exploring the great outdoors on their bikes to first-time freeriders out practising drops, to the races, which sell out within hours. Germany may still have some way to go to shrug off the stereotypes – many of which are unfounded or outdated – but they're forging ahead of many other nations when it comes to opening up this amazing sport of ours to a wider audience.

The riders we met all had one thing in common– a fun-loving attitude and refusal to take themselves too seriously. They were far more interested in having fun on the bike than looking cool – something some of us could probably learn from. And though there's been a lack of top German riders on the world stage in recent years, with Fischi making inroads into the top 20 at World Cups, that could be about to change. Could Germany one day dominate the UCI World Cup in the same way they dominated this year's FIFA World Cup?



GERMANY'S BIKE PARKS

While the north of Germany is fairly flat, there are plenty of rolling hills as you head further south, culminating in the jagged peaks of the Bavarian Alps. Trail builders have made good use of the ski facilities that until recently lay dormant in the summer months and there are now a huge range of bike parks catering for all abilities. This means Germany has a lot to offer riders looking for adventure away from the usual European spots.



1 SCHULENBERG

Racepark Schulenberg is situated in the north of Germany, near the industrial town of Hanover. A drag lift takes riders to the top, where three blue-rated downhill and freeride trails lie waiting.

DH FR

www.bikepark-schulenberg.de

2 BRAUNLAGE

Bikepark Braunlage offers 18km of gravity trails accessed via a six-person gondola. There are a range of green, blue, red and black trails, with 'chicken runs' to allow all riders to navigate their way down safely.

DH FR

www.bikepark-braunlage.de

3 FICHTELGEBIRGE

The not-very-German-sounding Bullhead Mountain Bikepark boasts a quick and efficient lift that opens up access to trails littered with rocks, roots and manmade features, and suitable for a variety of skill levels.

XC DH FR

www.fichtlride.de

4 BISCHOFSMAIS

Set in a wild Bavarian forest close to the Czech border, Bischofsmais's Bikepark Geisskopf tops out at 1,097m (3,600ft) and offers a mix of downhill and freeride trails featuring everything from manmade obstacles to classic woodland singletrack. A bike rental service is also available.

DH FR

www.bikepark.net

5 SAMERBERG

While it's not the biggest bike park in Germany, Samerberg is possibly one of the most fun, with an array of enjoyable but challenging downhill and freeride trails packed with jumps and berms, plus an XC route for those looking to get the miles in.

XC DH FR

www.bikepark-samerberg.de

6 LENGGRIES

Located south of Munich, Bikepark Lenggries has a range of gravity-assisted trails, from easy green-rated runs to tracks featuring larger drops and jumps for more experienced riders, all of which are accessed by lift.

DH FR

www.bikepark-lenggries.com

7 OBERAMMERGAU

Another Bavarian bike park situated in the heart of the forest, Oberammergau offers a mixture of entry-level downhill runs and freeride obstacles, along with a 4X track and a challenging yet fun cross-country course.

XC DH FR 4X

www.bikepark-oberammergau.de

8 HINDELANG

Situated in the south, close to the Austrian border, Bike-Park Hornbahn Hindelang offers three gravity-fed trails ranging from a moderately difficult blue to pro-ready black runs and has a shop, rental bikes and a bike wash.

DH FR

www.bikepark-hindelang.de

9 TODTNAU

Todtnau is one of Germany's better known riding locations thanks to the iXS Downhill Cup using its rough-and-ready downhill track, which has plenty of rocks, roots and steep chutes to challenge visitors who are eager to test their mettle.

DH FR

www.bikepark-todtnau.de

10 ALBSTADT

Open since 2009, Bikepark Albstadt is best known for hosting a round of the XC World Cup, it caters for all disciplines with a total of four trails.

XC DH FR

www.bikepark-albstadt.info

11 BAD WILDBAD

Situated in the heart of the Black Forest, Bikepark Bad Wildbad offers riders a unique experience – the trails drop into the town below, where a renovated mountain railway picks you up and takes you back to the top.

DH FR 4X

www.bikepark-bad-wildbad.de

12 BEERFELDEN

Open from March to October each year, Bikepark Beerfelden has seven trails ranging from beginner-friendly green all the way to pro-level black runs.

DH EN

www.bikepark-beerfelden.de

13 WINTERBERG

Bikepark Winterberg is Germany's most popular freeride destination. Poor snowfall in recent winters has resulted in further investment in mountain biking, resulting in a mix of trails to suit all tastes and abilities.

XC DH FR

www.bikepark-winterberg.de

14 WILLINGEN

Open all year, Willingen is easily the most famous bike park in Germany thanks to exposure on the World Cup downhill circuit and its infamous jumps. Also boasting freeride and XC trails, this resort is far from a one-trick pony.

XC DH FR

www.willingen.de

15 WARSTEINER

Gravity fed from the outset, Warsteiner Bikepark offers riders a mix of trails and features, from downhill runs to North Shore drops and even a slopestyle course for brushing up on those essential tricks and stunts.

DH FR

www.warsteiner-bikepark.de

XC Cross-country DH Downhill FR Freeride EN Enduro 4X Four-cross


143



SINGLETRACK HEAVEN... & HELL

Matt Page experiences the highs and lows of a unique six-day race through western Canada

A higher percentage of singletrack than any other endurance race – that's what the organisers of the innaugural Singletrack 6 promised. And that's what they delivered, discarding the point-to-point format of their previous event, the TransRockies Challenge, and focusing on incorporating the best trails possible. Some 350 riders descended on the Kootenay area of the Rocky Mountains for the innaugural race, including our favourite MTB masochist, Matt Page – who soon discovered that all that singletrack wasn't going to make for an easy ride...

Words Matt Page **Pics** Raven Eye Photography



HOW TO SURVIVE A MULTI-DAY EVENT

Pack your bike well and take plenty of spares, especially when flying your bike over. The last thing you want is to bend a mech hanger and not be able to replace it.

Keep fuelling yourself. Making sure you replace calories burned at the end of each stage will be vital to the following day's performance.

Ride within your limits. Don't charge off the front on day one. Think of the long game.

STAGE BREAKDOWN

What the competitors rode each day



Stage 1: West Bragg Creek (40km)
Long singletrack climbs then fun, technical downhills that felt quite similar to trails back in the UK.

Stage 2: Nipika (38km)
Root-infested singletrack from start to finish. Tough on the body but some incredible views and amazing riding along and across canyons.

Stage 3: Invermere (47km)
Dry and dusty. A different feel from every other stage. Faster and more open, with fun sandy singletrack to finish.

Stage 4: Golden – Mount 7 (30km)
A big gravel climb followed by the best downhill of the week. Short but sweet stage with some of the best singletrack of the event.

Stage 5: Golden – Moonraker (58km)
The biggest and best stage. Super-fun singletrack seemed to lift riders to the top, then there was rollercoaster singletrack with vertigo-inducing drops alongside Creek Canyon.

Stage 6: Revelstoke (47km)
Not the easy final day that people were perhaps expecting. Soaring temperatures and a challenging track filled with technical climbs and descents gave a fitting end to a top event.

HIGHS

"Stages four and five held in Golden, BC, were without a doubt the highlight of the event. The singletrack was the best I've ever ridden, being more flowing than ultra technical, and they were days I'll never forget."

"The towering peaks, deep canyons and fast flowing glacial rivers and lakes make the event a truly beautiful ride. That is, if you can take your eyes off the singletrack!"

"While there's no event camp, losing some of the community feel, the organisation can't be faulted – impeccable timing, great food and a great team of people behind it."

LOWS

"Realising very soon that I'd brought the wrong bike. ST6 isn't an event for a hardtail! Although you don't need a big-travel bike, it'd have been more enjoyable with full suspension."

"The roots. Lots and lots of roots. Some days were worse than others, but they should perhaps rename them the Rooty Mountains."

"While it was no fault of the organisers, many riders were sent the wrong way on stage three. It affected many of those racing for positions and put a downer on an otherwise superb event."

Matt's diary







Day 1 "Two minutes to start – riders get ready." A quick look around at the other riders isn't a great way to settle the nerves. Have I brought the wrong bike? Have I done enough training? The hooter is blown and we're off! A nice, gradual fireroad climb allows the riders to spread out. Then, after 3km, we head into singletrack – which goes on for the next 37km. Riding singletrack for so long is taxing both mentally and physically. No chance to turn off, no easy riding. It's twisty, undulating and technical, and since the trails here are designed to be ridden in either direction, the climbs are never easy. It soon becomes apparent that the Canadian riders are a step above and untouchable on the singletrack. Stage one is a great intro and the easiest of the six, with trails that feel more like British riding than the rest of the week.

Day 2 The same can't be said for stage two in Nipika. The roots are relentless and riding a hardtail really isn't helping my enjoyment. It's a real low point of the week and the amazing views only briefly take my mind off the pain. The locals absolutely love it and ride the roots with the kind of flow I can't even dream of.

Day 3 Moving to stage three, just a short transfer away, is like moving to a different climate. Each valley in the Rockies seems to have its own microclimate, from lush green and damp in Nipika to dry, dusty, almost desert-like conditions in Radium Hot Springs. The riding in Radium is very different too. Lots more doubletrack and dusty singletrack that's been built by locals puts a smile back on my face that only gets bigger on stages four and five in Golden.

Day 4 & 5 Sometimes singletrack is fun to ride but terrible to race on. Other times, it just makes it even more memorable. Golden is a riding area I'll never forget – two days that'll go down as the best days' racing I've ever had, with trails that are technical but not so hard that they can't be ridden flat out, blind. The views are the best of the week too, though I can't dwell on them too long because much of the riding is along the top of a canyon with a vertical drop that comes a little too close for comfort at times. If I come back to Canada to ride in the Rockies, Golden is on my list. It's one of those places that goes under the radar of most, but offers over 100km of singletrack with riding for everyone from beginners to high-standard downhill riders.

Day 6 The final day is always a strange one in a stage race. You feel the relief of getting to the final day and looking forward to recovery and rest, but also the realisation that the event and trip is almost over. We enter another new trail area, starting from the town of Revelstoke on the banks of the mighty Columbia River. It's no easy ride, with the return of rooty trails – only this time the roots have doubled in size. It could be a film title! Exiting the final downhill and heading over the finish line is quite a relief. The rough trails have punished my body and I'm ready for the end.

T-129

120MM XC/TRAIL SUSPENSION 29ER





With more awards to its name than any bike we've ever made, including the coveted Trail Bike of the Year award in 2013, there's little to say about the T-129 that hasn't been said before. Key to the bike's success is its enviable geometry and the shortest chainstays in the industry. Riders considering a move to a single-ring groupset will love the new for 2015, range-topping Works SCR option. Sporting super-stiff symmetrical chainstays and restricted to a single chain ring, the Works SCR is a viable short travel enduro machine for riders who love to go fast downhill, uphill, and everywhere in between.

"The T-129 is surefooted, very capable and a hell of a lot more fun than a 120mm 29er really should be. We love it" ★★★★★ MBUK October 2014

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Giro's Dain Zaffke beachcombing by the iconic Steamer Lane point break



Tom Morgan and Scot Nicol are two of the five owners of Ibis Cycles





Santa Cruz Bicycles proudly display some of the Syndicate's winning bikes in their foyer





SANTA CRUZ NOT JUST A BIKE BRAND



There's more to California's 'surf city' than the iconic bike company that takes its name – it's an MTB haven, with killer riding, a great bike culture and some of the world's biggest bike brands calling it home

Words Doddy **Pics** Steve Behr

Sandwiched between San Francisco and Los Angeles on the west coast of America, the city of Santa Cruz is in a pretty much perfect position in mountain biking terms. Marin County – the birthplace of the sport – is a short drive to the north and the awesome Laguna Hills are a few hours south. Hop on a short flight and you can be in British Columbia, and a day on the road will take you to Moab, Utah. It's no wonder such a thriving portion of the mountain bike industry is based in the area. We called in for a whistlestop tour of some of the most influential brands in town.

Kings of cool

Santa Cruz Bicycles have been here since 1993 when pro skater Rob Roskopp teamed up with Rich Novak of Santa Cruz Skateboards to start a new MTB project and developed the Tazmon – a 3in (76mm) travel single-pivot bike that was years ahead of its time. Since then the brand have gone from strength to strength, and they were one of the industry's first major adopters of carbon fibre.

"We strive to make the best stuff, regardless of expense," Santa Cruz's Kiran MacKinnon tells us. "We want the coolest cutting-edge stuff with the







highest quality, as soon as possible. From the start we were uncompromising with carbon frame development, and I think the strength and reliability of our frames is a big part of why we have such a loyal following."

Kiran started with Santa Cruz when he was at high school. Engineering director Joe Graney gave him some part-time work cleaning up in the workshop, but spotted that he had more to offer and soon had him working in the engineering department.

"Our test mules are all welded in house," Kiran tells us, "so it's easy to make changes if something isn't quite right. For big projects like the new Nomad, we had a few frames welded at the same time so we could do back-to-back testing on various linkage configurations." The testing process is a huge part of bike development here, and the local trails offer everything – rough and rooty runs, flat-out fast bits and enough gnarly stuff to test any bike.

"Santa Cruz is a really nice place to live. There's good all- mountain riding, really good trail conditions year round, a beautiful coastline and the weather is always comfortable," Kiran says with a grin. "I've lived in the Santa Cruz area my whole life and wherever I go away, I really like coming back home."

A woman's touch

It's no secret that the Juliana line of women's bikes is part of Santa Cruz Bicycles – a quick look at the frames will tell you that – but it's a brand with its own distinct identity. As Katie Zaffke gives us the tour, she tells us: "Juliana Bicycles is aimed at serious women bikers. The brand is a means to differentiate the female customers who originally may have identified with Santa Cruz as a brand. Some women will still identify with Santa Cruz, and that's OK, but more and more women are starting to identify with the spirit of Juliana. Our brand is a banner."

The women's market is growing fast and not only are Santa Cruz right to push a high-end brand like this, but they've put the perfect person behind it. Katie is a ripper on a bike, and really does live and breathe bicycles. "I desperately wanted to see the brand succeed when I became an ambassador, because I knew it had bigger potential than just offering bikes to women," she says. "Juliana are killing it and I still feel like the luckiest girl in the world to have scored this job – I frickin' love living and working in Santa Cruz!

"Sure, I love the trips I've been on – to New Zealand and France, Scotland, Moab and Sedona – but man, Santa Cruz is it! I have a three-minute pedal to work, a five-minute pedal to our local world-class trails, a seven-minute pedal to the beach, and all the good friends, food and beer a girl could ask for within just blocks. I'm all in!"

Boutique bikes

Just behind Santa Cruz's HQ are Ibis Cycles, who started life in 1981 when founder Scot Nicol was bitten by inspiration following a road trip to Crested Butte, Colorado, with mountain bike pioneers Joe Breeze, Gary Fisher and Charlie Cunningham. Joe and Charlie showed Scot the craft of frame building, and shortly afterwards he was making his own frames.

These days, Ibis are still a boutique brand, but they now specialise in carbon fibre construction. They're currently

"I still feel like the luckiest girl in the world to have scored this job – I frickin' love living and working in Santa Cruz!"
Katie Zaffke
Juliana Bicycles



"We want the coolest cutting-edge stuff with the highest quality, as soon as possible"
Kiran MacKinnon
Santa Cruz Bicycles





focusing on offering carbon to a bigger market – something they hope to achieve not by using lower grade materials but by offering great complete build packages using their own carbon fibre components.

"The future of carbon fibre is unglamorous stuff like improvements in the production processes and improved efficiency," partner Tom Morgan tells us. "A huge amount of time is spent on finishing carbon frames – sanding, putty (to fill small cosmetic blemishes), painting and reworking. Reduce or eliminate that time and you'd gain more than through using lower-cost materials."

Although our conversation starts about production and costing, it soon veers on to the thing that spurs them on – riding. And there are enough excellent trails on the doorstep to make the Santa Cruz area a serious industry hotspot. Having been around from the beginning, Scot has seen the scene grow. "Entrepreneurs like Mike Sinyard (Specialized), Jim »

"Entrepreneurs like Mike Sinyard, Jim Gentes, Jim Blackburn and Bob Fox all launched their now legendary companies here"
Scot Nicol
Ibis Cycles



"We've had this goal to provide excellent performance, durability and quality, and people are finally catching on"

Joel Smith
X-Fusion



Kelly's bakery is a favourite with bike industry folk


Doddy joins the guys for a spin on the hills around Santa Cruz



Gentes (Giro), Jim Blackburn (Blackburn), and Bob Fox (Fox suspension) all launched their now legendary companies here in the 70s and 80s, attracting and nurturing talented people to work for them."

He adds: "Having Ibis in Santa Cruz enables us to live, ride and work in one of the best areas around. The moderate climate with its year-round riding, the incredible trails, the natural beauty of the redwoods and oaks, and of course the beach and ocean, are hard to beat."

Suspension suppliers

Mountain biking runs through Joel Smith's veins, and with a diverse background including time at Manitou, editing *Mountain Biker* magazine and owning Tomac Bikes, he was the perfect person for X-Fusion to snap up in 2011 when they wanted to make headway as a suspension brand.

"Five years ago we moved the office from the San Jose area," he says. "We chose Santa Cruz because we do all of the development and testing in the US and we need a good place to ride all year around. Santa Cruz is also a good spot because we can be closely connected to the bike companies in the area."

Their base in Santa Cruz has helped X-Fusion get their forks, shocks and dropper posts specified on more complete bikes – a huge deal for a smaller manufacturer. "Specialized have always been X-Fusion's biggest customer, but Ibis were the first company who proved you could sell a high-end bike with X-Fusion," says Joel. "I'll forever be grateful to Tom and Hans at Ibis for this. They took a chance with X-Fusion because they believed in what we were trying to do. It really helped get the ball rolling and made it easier for companies like Intense, Rocky Mountain, Norco, GT and Cannondale to use X-Fusion on performance bikes."

Not only has Joel helped increase the visibility of the brand, he's worked hard on product development too. "We've had this goal to provide excellent performance, durability and quality, and people are finally catching on," he says. "I'm really excited about the near future too – we have a lot of exciting products coming!"

Helmet pioneers

Dain Zaffke is one of the politest, happiest and most enthusiastic guys in the industry. He's also annoyingly fast – with a perfect power-to-weight ratio, he flies up hills faster than a rat up a drainpipe. His passion for what Giro are doing is infectious – he's not spinning the company line, he just loves what he does.

Before Giro, some mountain bikers wore leather roadie 'sausage hats' and some even used mountaineering helmets. Nothing decent existed until Jim Gentes developed the ProLight, a lightweight helmet with decent ventilation and interchangeable coloured Lycra covers.

"It's no secret that Giro and Bell are both part of the same company – Bell-Riddell-Giro Sports," Dain tells us. "We're the global leaders in helmets for cycling, snow, football and power sports, and this is entirely due to our dedication to testing and R&D. The Giro HQ alone houses 14 different helmet testing fixtures. We have other facilities around the world and we use third-party laboratories."

> "We're not interested in chasing market trends – the pieces we're planning will be exciting and different."
> **Dain Zaffke** Giro

But it's not just helmets that Giro make – in recent years they've been making excellent clothing and shoes too. "From the Jacket DH/dirt jump shoe to the Terraduro and the new Empire VR90, we believe we have the most comprehensive range of off-road footwear on the market," says Dain.

"Mountain biking is very near and dear to most of the staff here, and we're eager to bring some new ideas to the trail. I'm personally excited about a couple of opportunities in particular that are borne from needs that I see every time I ride. We're not interested in chasing market trends though – the pieces that we're planning will be exciting and different."

The message from our flyby tour of Santa Cruz is clear – it's one hell of a place to develop mountain bikes and kit, and the people who are based here love the place. Part of the attraction is that the trails never feel too crowded. With a wry Californian grin creeping across his face, Dain tells us what he thinks of the riding scene here. "Santa Cruz? Nah. Not much here. Don't bother. You're better off going to LA or New York..."



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PLUS



102 SIX OF THE BEST
Rear LED lights reviewed



104 MBUK MACHINES
The latest on our rides



126 GROUP TEST
Waterproof jackets rated

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02 We have unrivalled knowledge and experience

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Test in real riding conditions till we know everything there is to know about the product

Re-test product with another tester

OUR TESTER TEAM

Our two main bike testers, Guy Kesteven and Seb Rogers, have tested more than 3,000 bikes between them over the past 20 years.

Our testing is headed up by our Technical Editor in Chief, Rob Weaver, who gets new products in as soon as they're available and coordinates all the testing through our vastly experienced band of testers.

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MBUK Test Team



Rob Weaver

With two decades of riding and racing experience, Rob knows what works and what doesn't...



Andrew Dodd

Doddy tests masses of kit every month. He has high standards and high expectations



Olly Forster

Gravity loving Olly has been riding long enough to know what he wants and won't settle for second best



Guy Kesteven

Our ultra experienced northern test engine is the ultimate exposer of kit that doesn't measure up



James Blackwell

Short and fast, pinned or binned, Art Editor Jimmer has been testing kit longer than he'll happily admit to



Jake Ireland

Jake spends every day riding, and his injury list proves he's pushing the limits to provide the very best testing



ALSO TAKE A LOOK AT

▲ **FOR £31 MORE TRY:**
Troy Lee Designs D2 Composite Midnight £199.99 www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk

▼ **FOR £19 LESS TRY:**
Giro Cipher £149.99 www.zyro.co.uk

T.H.E. Thirty3 Composite full-face helmet

£169 **Silverfish** www.silverfish-uk.com

THE THIRTY3 HAS been designed specifically for mountain bike and BMX use but exceeds the DOT standard for motocross lids, showing just how robust it is.

The fit is slightly less face-hugging than on the similarly priced Giro Cipher, but the extra room doesn't relate to any more movement when riding. The pads and liner are comfy, though the shape of the helmet means its fit won't please everyone – and its hot rod inspired looks are equally opinion dividing. It secures with a D-ring closure and has a popper to keep the tail of strap from flailing around.

As well as the whole liner being removable for washing, the cheek pads are designed to be easily removable by paramedics should you crash and the lid is also compatible with the airbag-based Eject Helmet Removal System (not included).

The vents may be small but they provide enough airflow to keep your bonce cool, and we didn't have fit issues with any of the goggles we tried the helmet with thanks to the large front opening. The Thirty3 comes packaged in a helmet bag akin to those that come with lids at twice the price and a spare peak is included too. **JAKE**

MBUK

Affordable and packed full of safety features, all for a good price. Check the fit before buying though

★★★☆☆

Fox Indicator jersey

£40 **Fox** www.foxhead.com

FOX'S INDICATOR JERSEY has mesh panels under the arms and across the top of the shoulders to stop you getting too sweaty, and on the trail they work relatively well. The cut is relaxed enough to look casual but still tailored enough to work well on the bike, with just the right amount of length in the sleeves and back to keep you covered when you're stretched out and pedalling. When you do get sweaty, the Quick Dry fabric wicks relatively well and, unsurprisingly given the name, dries pretty quickly too. Add to that the hidden glasses wipe and discrete zipped lift-pass pocket and you're on to a winner. **ROB**

MBUK ★★★★☆



MRP Stage 29er fork

MBUK MOST WANTED

£749.99 Ison Distribution
www.ison-distribution.com

CHAIN GUIDE GURUS MRP took White Brothers' Loop fork under their brand umbrella just over a year ago, but the Stage is their first 'new build' suspension unit. Five months of riding has proved it to be a tough contender with some unique adjustments.

Structurally, it uses a forged crown and fat-arched lowers that slide on substantial 34mm stanchions. The 29er version (there's a 26in/650b model too) comes in 120 to 150mm travel options (4.7-5.9in), with 10mm-at-a-time travel change achieved through internal spacer juggling. The wheel is secured with MRP's QtapeR 15mm axle, which offers fast variable-angle security, though you need to keep it clean to stop it sticking.

Weight is high at over 2kg cut to fit, but a lot of that comes from the amount of lube and damping oil inside. All MRP forks are fully tested and QC carded before they leave the factory, and this gives the Stage super-long 200-hour recommended service intervals. Our test fork is still feeling fresh after five months, even though we've not stripped it yet.

The large-volume negative spring combines with all that oil to create a super-supple start stroke. It soaks up roots and ripples, giving a tracking feel better than its average chassis stiffness (for a 34/35mm fork) would suggest.

Seven compression damping settings (plus a light lockout mode) control initial sensitivity, with a magnetic blow-off valve stopping any spiking even if you properly slam it into something. There's also a leg-top Ramp Control dial that allows independent deep-stroke damping adjustment. That means you can run the fork firm-starting and linear or – like we did – buttery at the top but with the damper adding mid-stroke control.

Set up like that, you've got excellent small-bump traction but enough support for scything turns or stopping braking dive. The trade-off is that we never got the full 140mm of travel. The stroke you do get is impressive enough to make that incidental on an otherwise capable, controlled and minimal maintenance fork for those who prefer to ride rather than wrench after initial set-up is done. **GUY**

MBUK

Heavy, but widely and easily tunable, impressively plush, minimal maintenance trail fork

★★★★☆



ALSO TAKE A LOOK AT

▲ FOR £30 MORE TRY:
RockShox Pike RCT3 Solo Air 29 140 £780 www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk

▼ FOR £140 LESS TRY:
X-Fusion Trace RL2 DLA £609.99 www.upgradebikes.co.uk

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PRODUCT NEWS



X-tra Controls

We saw the revised X-Control XC/trail bike from Lapierre back in June, but details remained patchy as to whether we'd see a carbon version of the bike or not. We've just heard that alongside the three aluminium models there are also going to be two X-Controls with a carbon front triangle. The top 727 model will have 650b wheels, 120mm (4.7in) of travel up front and 100mm (3.9in) at the rear, and to cap things off, Shimano's new 11-speed XTR transmission, all for £4,399.99. For more info, head to **www.hotlines-uk.com.**



Sunn arise?

A new concept downhill bike from Sunn was spotted at the Roc d'Azur festival. After years of financial difficulties, could one of the most successful brands in downhill race history be about to make a comeback? It certainly looks that way, and we're bloody excited about it! The concept bike sported a single-sided rear swingarm and, interestingly, twin discs up front. Watch this space for more.

Shock news

EXT and Stendec have launched two new coil shocks, and we've managed to get our grubby little hands on one. Both the ARMA (downhill) and STORIA (enduro) are optimised for use with 650b wheels and the higher speeds you're likely to encounter when using them, and feature high- and low-speed compression damping adjustment, as well as rebound adjustment. The springs are made from a 'super alloy' that's said to rival the weight of titanium but costs significantly less. They're available in 25lb increments, which should help with tuning. Head to **www.stendec works.com** for the full lowdown. »



DHB Switch convertible softshell jacket

£54.99 **Wiggle** www.wiggle.co.uk

THE SWITCH IS a lightweight jacket that converts into a gilet, making it handy for changeable weather days. The cut is on the cross-country side, hugging the torso nicely rather than looking baggy and casual. That's no bad thing on a garment that's designed to shut out the elements though. The arms are a good length and the back has a slight drop to protect your rear end from spray. The polyester fabric stretches well when you're in the saddle, keeping movement free and easy while doing a sterling job of cutting out the chill when worn with a baselayer. If you do start to warm up, converting the Switch into a gilet is easy thanks to the zip-off arms, which can be stashed in one of the four back pockets, two of which are zipped. There's also a front ('Napoleon') pocket for your MP3 player with a small hole for your earphones. Reflective print on the back and arms finishes things off nicely. **JAMER**

MBUK ★★★☆☆



Scott Progressive 10 shorts

£89.99 **Scott Sports**
www.scott-sports.com

BEARING ALL THE hallmarks of quality we've come to expect from Scott, the Progressive 10 shorts are designed with lift-assisted downhill riding in mind. There's a full-length mesh lining to stop things getting too sweaty and a well sized zipped pocket on the left hip further enhances their alpine credentials, with room for a lift pass and other essentials. The elastic waistband gives a good fit, and while the long 330mm inseam (on the medium size tested) might be a bit much for shorter riders, coming down well over the knee – think along the lines of the old Fox Demo shorts – these could well be the answer for taller riders looking for tough, well-made shorts with a bit of extra length. **OLLY**

MBUK ★★★☆☆

Sixpack Kamikaze direct-mount stem

£64.99 (neon yellow) **Tweeks Cycles** www.tweeks-cycles.co.uk

THE KAMIKAZE'S SUPER-WIDE 64mm bar clamp and four-bolt faceplate mean there's no flex when you really crank the bike into turns or pull up on the bar – just what you want when riding downhill. The 155g weight is pretty respectable too. The reach can be set to 45 or 50mm, so you get some adjustment should you want to play with set-up a little. Torque settings are printed on to the inside of the clamp face, and the big central hole in the faceplate helps with getting things lined up. We're not sure we'd pay the extra £5 for the neon yellow paint though – if it's not your thing, the stem's also available in other colours or plain black. **JAKE**

MBUK ★★★☆☆





Renthal Fatbar Carbon

£134.99 **Ison Distribution** www.ison-distribution.com

THE RENTHAL FATBAR, with its distinctive gold finish, is one of the most sought-after bars on the scene, due in part to the four different rises available and its dependable strength. Four rises are available on this new carbon fibre version too – 10, 20, 30 and 40mm – with the same 780mm width, seven-degrees of backsweep and five degrees of upsweep as the alloy bar. Some riders may find a nine-degree backsweep more comfortable, but we love the aggressive feel of the seven-degree bar. We weighed our 30mm rise Fatbar Carbon at 227g – some 120g lighter than the alloy version. The handlebar is a great area to save weight on the bike, and the carbon actually improves ride feel too. In general use the bar feels as stiff as the alloy version, but on rough tracks the flex Renthal have built in makes for a comfier ride – buzz is dramatically reduced. **DODDY**

MBUK ★★★★☆

Race Face Indy knee pads

£64.95 **Silverfish UK Ltd**
www.silverfish-uk.com

GETTING THE BALANCE right between all-day pedalling comfort and a decent level of protection in a trail knee pad isn't an easy task, but the Indys from Race Face certainly come close. The tight-fitting mesh sleeve has a silicone strip and single Velcro strap up top to prevent slippage. We found that the fit on our medium pads was so snug there was no need to use the strap and even after multiple crashes, they barely budged. Considering their lightweight build and lack of bulk, we've been constantly impressed by the protection on offer too.

Initially, we were impressed by their pedalling comfort too, with the pads staying firmly in place and the D3O padding comfortably bending with each and every pedal stroke. But during a couple of long, hot days in the saddle, two of our testers suffered quite bad rubbing to the shins due to the slightly pointed edge at the bottom of the D3O padding. Although annoying, we found this was easily remedied by tucking the lower part of the mesh sleeve under the bottom of the padding. **ROB**

MBUK

Lightweight, secure and offer decent protection for their weight and bulk, but need adjustment to stop rubbing

★★★½☆



ALSO TAKE A LOOK AT

▲ **FOR £15 MORE TRY:**
SixSixOne EVO £79.99
www.sixsixone.com

▼ **FOR £20 LESS TRY:**
Fox Launch Enduro £44.99
www.foxhead.com



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PRODUCT NEWS Continued



Room for the kitchen sink

Enjoy building trails but struggle to fit all the kit you need for dig days into your pack? The EVOC Trail Builder could be your answer. We've just got hold of one and it's cavernous to say the least. It comes with a detachable nail wrap and you can easily attach a hammer, axe and, of course, the obligatory chainsaw for more serious work. The 30l capacity includes dedicated compartments for tools and storing wet items, which is always going to be handy in the UK. It'll set you back £199.95. For more info, visit **www.silverfish-uk.com.**

Featherweight hoops

Fulcrum's new Red Passion wheels are claimed to weigh just 1,350g (650b) or 1,398g (29in) a pair. The weight savings are a result of their new alloy rim and carbon bodied, alloy flanged hub designs. The tubeless-ready wheels get 28 spokes at the front and rear, a reasonable 21mm internal width and, thanks to included adaptors, should work with all the axle configurations out there. They'll set you back £799.99. Check out the full range at **www.i-ride.co.uk**.



On Point

Chain guide gurus Gamut have just bought Point One Racing, who were renowned for innovative, nicely finished products, including their Podium pedals. If you're worried Point One might lose their way under new ownership, fear not – lead designer and co-founder Jimmy Amaral will be moving with them and focusing on creating more quality kit. For all the latest, head to **www.madison.co.uk**.



ALSO TAKE A LOOK AT

▲ **FOR £40 MORE TRY:**
GoPro HERO4 Black edition
£369.99 www.madison.co.uk

▼ **FOR £140 LESS TRY:**
Contour ROAM3 £189.99
www.ultrasporteu.com

Sony HDR-AS100V action camera

£329.99 **Sony** www.sony.co.uk

THIS POV CAMERA shoots 1,080-pixel footage at 60 frames per second, 720p at 120fps and 480p at a whopping 240fps. It can also capture 13.5-megapixel still images, with its Carl Zeiss lens providing excellent image quality and colour. It's showerproof and weighs just 92g (though if you stick it in its water- and bashproof casing, the weight roughly doubles).

The optional stabilising feature gives a very smooth picture without sacrificing sharpness – we rode with a loose mount and though the camera movement was noticeable, the image remained clear. It deals with low light and transitions well too. Though it struggled a couple of times when going from dark to bright on surfaces with lots of glare – wet Tarmac, for example – the image remained sharp, with minimal noise.

The wrist-worn remote is easy to use but can't play back footage, which is frustrating, and the standard helmet mount only works on full-face or pisspot lids with a large surface area. A side mount is available and offers a better position than the on-top mount, which exposes the camera to low branches. **DODDY**

MBUK

Records excellent quality footage, but pricey and the mounting system could be improved

★★★☆☆

Gamut CILLOS 50 stem

£74.99 **Madison** www.madison.co.uk

MBUK MOST WANTED



GAMUT'S CHAIN DEVICES have been taking the hits on our bikes for years, so when they announced they were making a stem, we knew we could expect some serious attention to detail. The options are simple – a choice of grey or black finishes and 40 or 50mm lengths, both of which have no rise and a low 43mm stack height. At 155g for our 50mm sample, the CILLOS is nice and light, thanks in part to the impressive machining work that's removed any sharp edges – even the 5mm Allen bolts have conical heads, and the hollow central section means you can see your front wheel when you look down! The faceplate machining makes it easy to get your bar central and there's no noticeable flex on the trail. The stem clamps the bar and steerer securely at the recommended torque settings so there's no need to get ham-fisted, and Gamut are so confident in its strength that is has a lifetime warranty. **JAKE**

MBUK ★★★★☆



ALSO TAKE A LOOK AT

▲ **FOR £160 MORE TRY:**
Gravity Dropper Turbo LP £280
www.hotlines-uk.com

▼ **FOR £20 LESS TRY:**
RSP Plummet £104.99
www.raleigh.co.uk

ICE Lift V8 Delux dropper seatpost

£120 **R53 Sport** www.r53sport.com

THE BIGGEST COMPLAINTS about dropper seatposts are that they're expensive, awkward to maintain and often won't fit in frames designed for skinny 27.2mm posts. The new ICE Lift V8 Delux provides a basic answer to all of those problems.

At £120 it's well under half the price of most of the competition, and that's because it uses a simple 'locking pin and hole' height setting system rather than complex hydraulics. This limits you to 45mm (1.8in) and 90mm (3.5in) drop positions, which might not be enough for some. There's a fair amount of back and forth rock and twist when you're in the saddle, but this hasn't got worse over time. It generally needs a bump from your bum and a firm press of the thumb remote to release it too.

The new angled and rotating exit point makes the cable less likely to rub rear wheels and frames than the old straight cable release. It's all easy to unscrew, clean and regrease if it gets grubby under the rubber gaiter, and you can slow down the savagely fast default return speed using an Allen key adjuster in the base.

At 353g the ICE Lift is no heavier than the RockShox Reverb and friends either. You can order it with a 30.9 or 31.6mm shim if your frame doesn't take a 27.2mm post, but check that your bike is warrantied for a shimmed post to avoid your bargain dropper turning out to be an expensive frame breaker. **GUY**

MBUK

Wobbly, crude operation and potential shim/warranty issues, but cheap, easily serviceable and fits all frames

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THE SMALL STUFF
MTB BITS AND PIECES



TATE LABS THE BARFLY GOPRO MOUNT

£44 **2pure** www.2pure.co.uk

The Barfly lets you tuck your GoPro down in front of the bar. The footage is good – if you like to see only the trail, with no part of your bike or body visible for context – with no noticeable camera shake. It's pricey though, and the small bolts are easy to lose when installing it. **MATT**

MBUK ★★☆☆☆



DARN TOUGH TEAM MICRO CREW ULTRALIGHT SOCKS

£14.30 **Darn Tough** www.darntough.co.uk

These merino wool socks keep your feet snug even when soggy and dry pretty quickly too without getting stinky. The shaping is great, but the styling won't suit everyone. **ROB**

MBUK ★★★☆☆

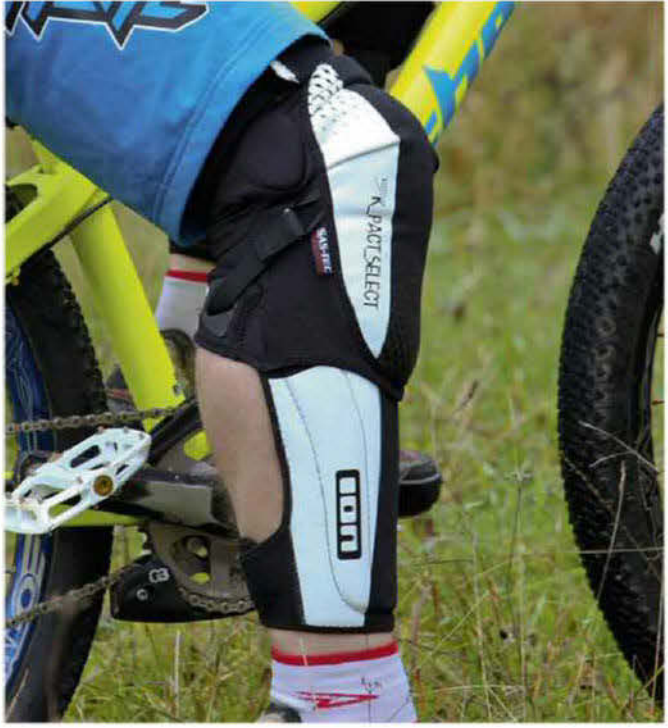


ION FRAME SAVER SAS-TEC

£29.95 **ION** www.ion-products.com

These 1.7mm thick stickers use shock-absorbing SAS-TEC to protect your paintwork from cable rub, rock strikes and chain slap (and quieten things down), and work very effectively. **DODDY**

MBUK ★★★★☆



ION K_Pact_Select knee/shin pads

£94 **ION** www.ion-products.com

THE K_PACTS SECURE in place like no other pads we've tried, staying exactly where they should do even during a full day of pedalling. The open design means you can put them on and remove them without having to slide them all the way up your leg. Three thick neoprene straps hold them super-securely in place, while a secondary strap behind the knee holds the knee cup in place while allowing the shin part of the pad to articulate when pedalling. They're warm when worn for long periods of time, but the articulation means they're perfectly comfortable to wear all day long. The soft SAS-TEC padding is flexible when pedalling but hardens under impact. The padding wraps around the leg well and neoprene patches on either side of the knee provide a bit more protection too. **JAKE**

MBUK ★★★½☆



Joystick Digger handlebar

£50 **Hookit**
www.hookitproducts.co.uk

NAMED AFTER CANADIAN trail builder Todd 'Digger' Flander, a portion of the profits from this bar's sales will go to trail building groups, both here in the UK and in Joystick's North American homeland. Constructed from the brand's '8-Bit' alloy and measuring in at 780mm wide with eight degrees of backsweep and five degrees of upsweep, the Digger feels comfy on the bike, though the 25mm rise won't suit everyone. The old-skool graphics make it easy to get the bar lined up centrally even in the widest of stems, though there are no cut marks for chopping it down. On the trail it feels comfortable, without any harsh vibration or noticeable undesirable flex. **JAKE**

MBUK ★★★☆☆



Giro DND gloves

£26.99 **Zyro** www.zyro.co.uk

THE DND (DOWN and Dirty) gloves from Giro use a cuffless, slip-on design that allows unrestricted movement at the wrist, helping to make these some of the comfiest gloves we've tried. The fit and shaping is spot on too, with the stretchy mesh upper hugging the back of the hand closely and the articulated cutouts on the thumb, index and middle finger helping to keep movement free and bunching minimal.

Though the upper material is stretchy and thin enough to allow heat to escape, it's tough enough to handle bramble snags and the like without ripping or fraying. The thin palm is well reinforced in all the high-wear areas without feeling bulky and gives plenty of feel and feedback from the grips. Other nice touches like the wraparound reinforced tips on the index and middle fingers, the toughened leather pull-on tab at the wrist opening and the snot wipe down the thumb mean the DNDs are well worth the cash. **ROB**

MBUK ★★★★½



Kali Amara helmet

£74.99 **Nrg4** nrg4.co.uk

AT 329G FOR the M/L size, the Amara is reasonably light and offers a bit more coverage than a regular XC lid, though not as much as the latest 'enduro' helmets. It sits high on the head, giving it a bulbous look on bigger bonces, and the long peak and dated graphics do it no favours in the looks department either. The shape suited our tester, but adjustment for fit is basic, with simple sliding ratchets at the rear and no allowance for differently proportioned craniums. Generous vents all round and space for air to move through the helmet mean cooling is effective, and we liked the optional bug mesh and integrated camera/light mount. **MATTHEW**

MBUK ★★★☆☆

Troy Lee Designs Ruckus shorts

£99.99 **Fisher Outdoor Leisure** www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk



ALSO TAKE A LOOK AT

▲ **FOR £30 MORE TRY:**
Gore Fusion 2.0 shorts £129.99
www.goreapparel.co.uk

▼ **FOR £50 LESS TRY:**
Madison Zenith shorts £49.99
www.madison.co.uk

THE RUCKUS SHORTS aren't cheap but they pack one hell of a punch on the trail and have quickly become some of our favourites. The shaping and fit are the main reasons we rate them so highly. The padded, high-backed waistband can be adjusted easily via two Velcro tabs, and combined with the well positioned stretch panel ensures the shorts don't droop down even when caked in mud. They remain incredibly comfy even when you're really clocking up the miles. Troy Lee have nailed the cut too, letting the leg drop just over the knee with enough room to sit over knee pads without flapping around with every pedal stroke.

There are stretchy mesh panels and hidden zipped vents to dump heat. And while we didn't find ourselves using the small zipped rear pocket often, the hip pockets – one of them zipped, the other not but accompanied by a zipped rear-facing pocket – were in constant use, holding keys or phones tightly enough to stop them banging about while riding. As you'd expect from TLD, the styling is great, and the included padded liner is one of our favourites too, helping to justify the price. **ROB**

MBUK

Balancing functionality with form extremely well, these are some of our favourites

★★★★½



RACE FACE
NARROW / WIDE CHAIN RINGS
With performance enhancing chain retention tooth profile technology.

"If you're going to buy a new single ring for your bike, make sure it's this one"
MBR MAGAZINE
10 mbr

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SRP: From £44.95

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REAR LIGHTS

Why upgrade...?



"The nights are drawing in and it's important to be seen when you're on your way to the trails. We generally keep our rear lights on during the day too at this time of year just to stay visible to everyone."



£39.99

NiteRider Solas

2Pure www.2pure.co.uk

SO GOOD... The belt clip built into the rear of the Solas means you can attach it to the supplied seatpost mount or directly to your bag/belt. The battery is USB rechargeable and even in the high-power constant mode (there's also a low-power and two flashing modes) lasted for just under four hours.
NO GOOD... The single LED emits a focused beam rather than a spread of light, reducing side visibility. The clumpy screw-on mount takes minutes rather than seconds to fit, but does hold the light securely. The light's not great value considering how basic it is, and the switch isn't easy to press when wearing gloves.

MBUK ★★½☆☆



£12.99

CatEye Nima

Zyro www.zyro.co.uk

SO GOOD... Despite its low price the Nima is sturdily built and battery life from the pair of CR2032 button batteries is extremely good too, at over 12 hours in the constant mode. Two flashing settings and a pulse mode help attract attention and the rubber strap is simple to secure to your seatpost.
NO GOOD... The single LED is dim compared to some of the others here and though the beam is wide, it'll only get you seen when it's properly dark. It's not rechargeable, but at this price it's hard to complain. The flimsy strap doesn't inspire confidence, but that's been fixed for the Nima 2, which should be available by the time you read this.

MBUK ★★½☆☆



£42.99

Knog Blinder Road R

Todays Cyclist www.todayscyclist.co.uk

SO GOOD... The four-LED Blinder has five modes – constant, two flashing settings and a pulse mode, plus a power-saving two-LED constant setting. The beam is wide and blindingly bright at full power, thanks in part to the more powerful bottom LED being angled to sit level when the light is attached to a seatpost. The battery lasted just under three hours in constant mode and there's a battery life indicator. The light is designed to plug directly into a USB port, though we had to use the short extension cable provided.
NO GOOD... The clamping mechanism is fiddly and the switch is hard to locate when wearing gloves. It's the priciest on test too.

MBUK ★★★½☆



£39.99

Lezyne Zecto Drive Auto

Upgrade Bikes www.upgradebikes.co.uk

SO GOOD... The Zecto comes with a strap mount and belt clip, giving plenty of mounting options. It has a super-wide beam and a choice of four flashing modes – including a super-bright 'daytime' setting – and two constant ones. The battery lasted two hours and 45 minutes on full power, and there are battery indicators on the sides of the light that improve visibility. A motion sensor turns the light off after three minutes of inactivity, and we couldn't trick it!
NO GOOD... The tight rubber cover on the USB port makes it a fiddle to get the cable to sit in place properly when charging, and the switch is hard to press with gloves on.

MBUK ★★★½☆



£27.95

BBB Signal

Windwave www.windwave.co.uk

SO GOOD... The Signal's strap-and-hook mount is integrated into the rear of its casing and spins a full 360 degrees so you can mount the light on anything the rubber strap will stretch around. The battery is rechargeable via USB cable and lasted just under two hours in the super-bright and daylight visible high-power mode. The wide beam provides almost 180-degree visibility.
NO GOOD... Our preproduction sample had low, standard and high-power constant modes but no flashing setting – but we've been assured that the production model will feature one.

MBUK ★★★★☆



MBUK WINNER

MBUK VALUE

£27.99

Moon Comet

Raleigh www.raleigh.co.uk

SO GOOD... The Comet comes with a saddle rail mount as well as a rubber strap mount – handy if you run a dropper post slammed into the frame. The strip-like LED has a super-wide beam and puts out a crazy amount of light on high power – it's blinding even in daylight. The USB recharge gave us just under three hours on high power. Depending on whether the light is mounted vertically or horizontally, it gives just under or over 180 degrees of visibility, and there's no way you'd miss that bright haze of light.
NO GOOD... Activation of the three flashing modes isn't very intuitive – but with a light this bright, you won't miss them.

MBUK ★★★★½



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GUY'S GIANT TRANCE 27.5 3

£1,499 **Giant** www.giant-bicycles.com



OK, let's be honest here – my utterly faithful Giant Trance long-termer now looks like the kind of mixed-up mutt you'd get from a dogs' home. Behind the taped-on inner tube, mismatched wheels and tyres, and general 'clean it less, ride it more' approach, this machine has been one of the toughest, most versatile and most fun test mules I've had, and I'm loving it now more than ever.

Starting with the really important stuff, it might be covered in muck but the cherry red paint is still remarkably intact considering how many brake and dropper post cable switches it's been through and how many times it's been tomahawked down the trail or bounced around with other bikes in cars or on uplifts.

Because every Trance frame gets the same top-quality linkage hardware and bearings (including the cunning shared bottom main pivot and shock mount set-up), we've not touched them since we unboxed the bike and they're still smooth and wobble free. And because the frame is made so accurately by Giant in the first place, even the normally short-lived press-fit bottom bracket bearings are lasting way longer than normal. That's a big difference to some long-term frames we've had, which have been almost double the price of the Trance 3 but have come apart or started creaking somewhere within an hour or so of starting every ride.

It's certainly not because it's had an easy life either. While the RockShox Sektor fork it came with is fantastic for the money and the original Giant wheels still appear back on it regularly, the Trance got roped into fork, wheel and, more recently, tyre testing straight away. Every single one of those tests means regular battering down the steepest, rockiest local trails and even several Fort Bill sessions. It's about to start all over again too with the 2015 fork tests, and while some of those shiny new spring sticks might not survive, we're pretty sure the Giant will come out the far side as fresh as ever.

SPEC DECK

ROCKSHOX PIKE RCT3 SOLO AIR FORK £780 www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk
ROCKSHOX MONARCH DEBONAIR SHOCK UPGRADE SLEEVE £100 www.fisheroutdoor.co.uk
SPECIALIZED COMMAND POST BLACKLITE DROPPER SEATPOST £200 www.specialized.com
SUPERSTAR PACENTI TESLA EVO WHEELS £269.99 www.superstarcomponents.com

MBUK Machines

We ride these long-term test bikes hard for a year, constantly scrutinising new kit, to bring you nothing but the truth about their performance



Guy's Trance may look like a bit of a mongrel now but this dog has far from had its day



Matt's loving ripping through the local woods on his Niner

MATT'S NINER RIP 9 SLX AM

£3,099 **Jungle Products** www.jungleproducts.co.uk



Sadly, due to a hectic month, there's been little opportunity for any epic rides or trips to trail centres. Instead I've been sneaking in as much time as possible at the local trails. It's a testament to the Niner's design and handling that it seems as at home eating through mud and roots as it is on manicured trail centre loops.

The RockShox Sektor fork and Monarch RT3 shock pairing makes for a balanced ride regardless of the terrain, which is a real confidence booster. Both are easy to set up – since setting the air pressures on day one, I've not touched them – and the intuitive on-the-fly adjustments have proved handy on every ride. I've found that a liberal squirt of Juice Lubes Fork Juice every now and again has kept things running nice and smoothly.

As the nights frustratingly begin to draw in, it's the time of year for the annual winterproofing. The trusty Shimano SLX rear mech looks in great nick, as you'd expect. Other than some replacement cables and some new grease for the bearings, we should be ready for the worst winter has to throw at us. I'll be taking the opportunity to dust off the stock Maxxis High Roller tyres too, which were relegated to the back of the shed for the summer months. The added grip and mud shedding will be appreciated when keeping the super-short back end in check when the trails get greasy.

JIMMER'S NORCO SIGHT CARBON 7 1.5

£3,000 **Evans Cycles** www.evanscycles.com



After an excruciatingly long six-week wait for a new mech hanger, I've finished the transmission swap on the Sight, upgrading the stock Shimano twin-ring set-up to the swanky new 11-speed SRAM X1. The bike looks cleaner, meaner, and is ready to rip. I've also acquired (on loan) a 2015 Fox 34 Float CTD fork from Jon, the editor of our sister mag *What Mountain Bike*. Hopefully the new transmission and fork will transform the Sight into a burlier but just as efficient ride. »



Jimmer has given the Sight a serious makeover

JAKE'S CUBE FRITZZ 160 HPA TM 27.5

£3,199 **Cube** www.cube.eu



The Fritzz really has had a crazy month. A trip to Mojo Suspension resulted in a new Fox 36 being bolted on, just in time for my trip to Finale Ligure in Italy for the final round of the Enduro World Series. A few relaxed days of riding mixed with sitting by the pool and eating copious amounts of Italian food suddenly got serious when the course opened for practice. We hopped in a van and got cracking shuttling the race stages. We weren't hanging about either, with super-fast Rose Bikes riders Katy Curd and Joost Wichman to chase.

Unfortunately, come stage one of the race I managed to blow my rear tyre off the rim and stack it pretty hard – something I like to call a 'mechani-crash'. I even smashed my Garmin into more pieces than I could pick up. I had to walk most of the stage and then, after bodging the tyre back on with a tube, ended up late for the rest of the day. On stage three I flatted again and ended up dead last thanks to the 10 minutes of penalties I picked up combined with the long walks.

Other than the rear wheel, the Fritzz was perfect though. The new 36 really is pretty impressive in terms of the amount of sensitivity and support it offers. I'll be embarking on a full rebuild of the bike this month to see just how well everything else held up.



ROB'S SPECIALIZED STUMPJUMPER FSR EXPERT CARBON EVO 29

£4,500 **Specialized** www.specialized.com



Before I finished testing the Roval Traverse Fattie SL carbon wheels reviewed last issue, I stuck a set of ENVE Composites M60s on the Stumpy for comparison. The ENVEs felt fast, stiff and accurate, but on rough descents I found myself missing the Rovals. Their wide 30mm inner width really makes a big difference in terms of comfort and traction, and though they're not as stiff as the M60s, they're less than half the price.



GUY'S LAPIERRE ZESTY TR 329

£2,099 **Hotlines** www.hotlines-uk.com



The massive difference that switching to a super-wide bar made to the Lapierre makes it the obvious host for our next big group test. You've guessed it – power assistance trail bars. We've got about 35 bars to filter down to a final test shortlist of 15, which means the Spank Spike stem is going to get some sore bolts over the next few weeks. If you're wondering how I've got on with the MRP fork, there's a full review of it in this month's Tested.



OLLY'S KONA PROCESS 153 DL

£3,999.99 **Kona** www.konaworld.com



With the Process in a really good place, I've not felt the need to do much to it past riding it as much as I can, mainly on some sweet local DH runs. As far as spec alterations go, I'm back on Andreu Lacondeguy's signature Sensus Disisdaboss grips and fluttering between a few different bars. The Thomson dropper post is still making me smile, while a Fabric Scoop saddle and Uber Components gear cable set are keeping it colour coordinated.



In its new stripped-down form, the Genius laps up technical descents

RIC'S SCOTT GENIUS 720

£2,999 **Scott Sports** www.scott-sports.com



Summer is resolutely over – a fact borne out by the small rockery I've created in front of my house by power-hosing the Scott. If a roving pack of geologists were to pass by and take a sample of the lumps of grit, gravel and rock now forming a mini beach by my bins (OK, it's unlikely), they'd find material not entirely in keeping with my Solway Coast surroundings...

I got the phone call from *MBUK* snapper Russell Burton late, but a four-day riding trip around some of northern Scotland's finest trails with our resident route scout Max Darkins proved too big a lure to resist. You'll be able to read all about the incredible routes we rode over the next few months, but the trip certainly took its toll on the Scott.

An over-the-bars at speed at the top of one of the best trails I've ever ridden left me with a bent rear brake lever, a lightly scuffed fork stanchion and, on closer inspection, a purple hip. A combination of rear brake pads on their last legs and four days of Scotland's finest organic grinding paste has produced some smoky, noisy, metal-on-metal braking too, and there are beginning to be the telltale signs of a freehub on its last wobbles.

My Fox DOSS dropper seatpost also took a hammering and switched to 'manual' mode on the last day. Hopefully a fresh cable and some TLC should sort that out. On the plus side, despite my long-standing hatred of internal bottom brackets, the Genius's Shimano job refuses to let go.

Though the trails were amazing, once again, it felt like the 650b wheeled Scott was battling to be comfortable in its own skin. The seven to nine hours of riding we were doing per day was definitely more in keeping with 29er territory, and I'd happily have swapped my 34/36t biggest gear combo for Russ and Max's 2x10 ratios. On the technical descents though, the Scott starred, making a detailed clean and rebuild well deserved.

MBUK

WRECKED & RATED

Bike Test

NEW YEAR'S FINEST

2015 BIKES

Words Guy Kesteven **Pics** Russell Burton

2015'S HOTTEST NEW BIKES

The Interbike show in Nevada is our first chance to test next year's bikes on properly technical trails, giving a great snapshot of the riding reality behind all the pre-release hype. So, what did we learn on the rocky, dusty, drifty trails of Bootleg Canyon?

While 650b bikes have rendered the 26in wheel size extinct – in terms of new development, at least – in an incredibly short time, 29in wheels aren't rolling over so easily. If you want to cover ground as quickly and smoothly as possible, large circumference is your friend, and the Niner ROS 9 and Specialized Camber here prove big-wheelers can be big fun too.

It's definitely 650b that's the hotbed of trail bike development though, with Giant, Devinci, Felt, Scott and others all rolling out their maximum enjoyment enduro machines on the 'new' wheel size – though design always matters more than diameter.

Because these bikes are so different, we've tested and scored them individually rather than head to head. So which of these six dust devils are we itching to ride again on UK shores and which were we happy to leave in Las Vegas? »



THE TESTER

Guy Kesteven
Guy's been hitting the rocky trails of Bootleg Canyon since '97 and knows they're the perfect place to get ahead of the curve with next year's bikes

THE LINE-UP



SPECIALIZED CAMBER EXPERT EVO £4,500



SCOTT GENIUS LT 700 TUNED £5,599



NINER ROS 9 £899 (frame only)



DEVINCI SPARTAN SX £4,349



FELT COMPULSION 10 £3,799



GIANT REIGN ADVANCED 27.5 1 £3,299





SPECIALIZED CAMBER EXPERT CARBON EVO

FRAME FACT 9m carbon mainframe, M5 alloy rear end, 120mm (4.7in) travel **FORK** RockShox Pike RC, 120mm (4.7in) travel **SHOCK** Custom Fox Float CTD Factory w/ Auto Sag **DRIVETRAIN** SRAM X01 (1x11) **WHEELSET** Roval Traverse Fattie 29 wheels, Specialized Butcher Control (F) and Ground Control (R) 29x2.3in tyres **BRAKES** Shimano Deore XT **BAR/STEM** Specialized XC, 720mm/Specialized, 70mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** Specialized Command Post IR/Specialized Body Geometry Henge Comp **WEIGHT** 12.22kg/26.94lb (L, with pedals) **PRICE** £4,500 **CONTACT** Specialized www.specialized.com

SO GOOD

Carbon front end is tight and tough

Pike fork and Auto Sag shock add excellent control to the sorted all-rounder spec

NO GOOD

Chaos-capable rear end and fork are gagging for a burlier cockpit and slacker head angle to make the most of them

Price is high for little-changed chassis and decent but not deluxe spec

JARGON BUSTER

142+
Specialized's take on the 142mm axle width standard moves the driveside flange and freehub further right towards a remodelled dropout to add stiffness.

Specialized's Camber frame isn't new, but this carbon 29er is still an evergreen in terms of all-round cross-country and trail riding appeal.

The frame

While the S-Works Camber gets a full-carbon frame, the 'carbon' in the name of the Expert only refers to the mainframe, which also gets a cheaper, slightly heavier layup. The big S-bend down tube, gull-wing top tube, PF30 bottom bracket and kinked seat tube layout is the same though. Internal cable routing for the gears, brakes and dropper post keeps the lines clean, and the tiny horseshoe linkage on the seatstays is particularly neat. From the low main pivot backwards, the Camber is butted alloy, with bigger-clearance dropouts to work with Specialized's unique 142+ rear axle.

The kit

That means the wheels are also from Specialized – low spoke count but wide rimmed Roval Traverse Fattie 29s wearing the brand's faithfully grippy Butcher and Ground Control tyres. Spesh supply the bar, stem, grips, saddle and internally routed post too. They've also worked with Fox on the proprietary Auto Sag rear shock, and were the first to field a cut-down 120mm (4.7in) travel version of RockShox's stout-legged Pike fork.

Outside of that it's the increasingly familiar situation of SRAM's super-secure and intuitive single ring, single shifter transmission (in this case the entry-level X1 spec) providing propulsion and Shimano (XT here) doing the stopping. The results are excellent in practical terms, but the Camber is fairly expensive for a half-carbon, alloy-wheeled, X1 spec machine. With fatter wheels, a smaller chainring (30 vs 32t) and a brake switch being the only spec changes from 2014, we'd be tempted to buy an end of season bargain instead.

The ride

Either way, the Camber is an immediately welcoming bike. The Auto Sag shock and Pike fork are easy to set up and the neutral FSR suspension sticks the rear wheel to the ground and sucks up bumps without demanding/imposing a specific riding or pedalling style. The Evo also gets 10mm more travel than the standard 110mm (4.3in) Camber so it can hit decent sized roots and rocks without getting knocked out of its impressively controlled stride.

In fact, it's so easy to ride fast on tech trails that you'll often find you're pressing the 720mm bar, 90mm stem and near 69-degree head angle too hard and stumbling over the front in corners. The stability of the long rear end and low BB puts more pressure on the front end in turns too, and even the mighty Pike fork has to work hard to strong-arm the steering back into shape sometimes.

At this point we have to remind ourselves that the Camber is designed to be nearer to the Epic XC bike than the Stumpjumper trail bike and Enduro big-hitter in terms of overall character. But while the quick-witted steerage pays dividends when picking your way through twisty singletrack or weaving up climbs, we'd definitely be tempted to fit a shorter stem, wider bar and extend the Pike to 140mm (5.5in) to make the most of the super-planted back end and stiff chassis.

MBUK

One of the most versatile XC/trail 29ers around, but not cheap and needs changes to unleash its full-gas EVO potential



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SCOTT GENIUS LT 700 TUNED

FRAME HMX carbon fibre, 170mm (6.7in) travel **FORK** Fox 36 Float CTD FIT Factory, 170mm (6.7in) travel **SHOCK** Fox Nude CTCD TwinLoc, 110-170mm (4.3-6.7in) travel **DRIVETRAIN** SRAM X01 w/ X1 chain (1x11) **WHEELSET** Syncros AM 1.5 wheels, Schwalbe Hans Dampf Evo TrailStar (F) and Rock Razor Evo PaceStar (R) 27.5x2.35in tyres **BRAKES** Shimano XTR M985 **BAR/STEM** Syncros AM1.0 Carbon, 760mm/Syncros XM1.5, 50mm (both 35mm diameter) **SEATPOST/SADDLE** RockShox Reverb Stealth/Syncros XM1.5 Titanium **WEIGHT** 12.18kg/26.85lb (L, with pedals) **PRICE** £5,599 **CONTACT** Scott Sports www.scott-sports.com

SO GOOD

Super-light frame with great geometry, premium performance spec and unique remote control suspension

Firmer shock tune gives a working edge to the previously wallowy, travel-wasting rear suspension

NO GOOD

Twin-chamber shock still feels like it delivers an inch less travel than it has

Set-and-forget riders won't like the constant shock toggling needed to extract its maximum potential

JARGON BUSTER

Remote lever
Handlebar-mounted lever that controls the fork, rear shock or dropper seatpost

Scott's Genius LT has been around for a while now, but the latest 700 Tuned model is the most dialled version yet, with firmer damping giving a much more balanced feel.

The frame

The LT has the same neat frame layout as the standard Genius and Spark, but Scott manage to squeeze 170mm (6.7in) of travel into the wraparound swing-link design. They're some of the most experienced carbon users in the business, and that shows in the chassis, which is lighter than a lot of short-travel frames. The dropper post, rear brake, shock remote and gear cables are routed internally, and there are chain guide and front mech mounts built in, though the SRAM X01 drivetrain fitted here doesn't need them. The LT is generously long too, with an enduro style 66-degree head angle and 1,200mm wheelbase. Flipping a chip at the shock mount lifts the BB by 7mm and steepens the angles by half a degree for a more 'trail bike'-like feel.

The kit

There's big news in terms of full-gas gravity capability in the shape of Fox's new 36 fork stretched to 170mm of travel to match the twin-chamber Nude shock. Both are linked to the same remote lever, with the Reverb Stealth dropper post button adding another cable to the cat's cradle front end. The SRAM X01 transmission means only one shifter though, so there's plenty of space on the wide, 35mm diameter carbon bar. Production bikes should get the latest Shimano XTR M9020 brakes, but our sample still had the older, heavier, all-metal M985 version. Scott-owned Syncros provide the pimpy carbon-rimmed AM1.5 wheels, stubby 50mm stem and Ti-railed saddle, while Schwalbe's Hans Dampf and Rock Razor tyre combo adds front grip and rear speed.

The ride

It's the speed of the LT that'll really take you by surprise if you've ridden other 170mm bikes – the 12kg, slick rear-tyred Scott leaps forward and carries on accelerating hard even with relatively light pressure on the cranks. While it can wallow a bit at full travel, one click of the remote closes part of the shock chamber for a firmer 110mm (4.3in) travel setting that's great for putting the power down. Two clicks gives you full lockout front and rear for smooth trail efficiency. Add the pedal clearance from the tall BB and the LT is an impressive climber.

Unsurprisingly, this easy speed carries through on to singletrack too, and the Scott was a lot of fun to hustle along the twisty rise-and-fall trails of Bootleg Canyon. While there's some twang from the frame if you drive it hard through corners, the fat-legged fork and chunky cockpit mean serious stiffness for hooking the front end into the tightest lines. Firmer, race inspired damping for 2015 also keeps the bike more level and balanced when cornering, even in the fully open mode.

The LT still feels more like a mid- rather than long-travel bike when clattering through big stuff, but now you can feel what it's doing and drive it hard rather than wallowing about in mush unless you're in Traction mode. The slick rear tyre also helps offset the slight frame flex and tall ride height, by starting to drift out just before it feels like the bike might highside you.

MBUK

A more secure, engaging and fun bike for 2015, without compromising its lightweight climbing and XC abilities

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UNLEASH THE BEAST
Our test bike's cockpit was a little XC biased, but adding a broader bar and a shorter stem puts the ROS properly into Beast Mode

SLIM JIM
Skinny steel tubes give the Niner an incredibly subtle and connected ride quality that rivals some short-travel full-suss bikes

AXLE OPTIONS
The Biocentric II eccentric bottom bracket lets you adjust effective seat angle, BB height and chainstay length, as well as tighten single gear chain tension

NINER ROS 9

FRAME 4130 chromoly **FORK** RockShox Pike RC, 120mm (4.7in) travel, **SHOCK** Not applicable **DRIVETRAIN** SRAM X1 (1x11) **WHEELSET** Stan's NoTubes ZTR Arch EX 29 wheels, Schwalbe Nobby Nic Snakeskin TrailStar (F) and PaceStar (R) 29x2.4in tyres **BRAKES** Shimano Deore M615 **BAR/STEM** Niner Flat Top Carbon, 710mm/Niner alloy, 70mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** RockShox Reverb Stealth/Niner Custom Cro Mo **WEIGHT** 13.08kg/28.84lb (L, with pedals) **PRICE** £899 (frame only) **CONTACT** Jungle Products www.jungleproducts.co.uk

SO GOOD

Addictively charismatic, spring heeled, trail smoothing singletrack weapon

Expensive for steel but cheap compared to many dull, generic carbon frames

NO GOOD

Heavy for a hardtail

Fans of stiff point-and-shoot precision need not apply

JARGON BUSTER

YAWYD: Niner's 'You Are What You Drink' top cap lets you fit your favourite bottle top on the top of your fork steerer

On paper, mixing slim steel tubes with enduro geometry is a recipe for a real mess, and even the design team at Niner admit that their ROS (Roll Over Sh*t) frame is a total indulgence. Riding this radical bike just goes to show that sometimes not making sense can be a huge amount of fun though.

The frame

Niner have always made beautiful frames, and the ROS 9 is no exception. The slim steel tubes are immaculately welded, and the way that the pencil-thin seatstays hook down to the bullet-shaped brake mounts and cowled dropouts is a thing of beauty. The 'Biocentric 2' eccentric BB unit clamps on to the outside of the big BB shell rather than expanding inside – the kind of detail that only comes from fresh-paper thinking about long-term use – and offers a 17mm change in BB position that's as much about letting you set your perfect seat angle, chainstay length and BB height as taking up the slack for singlespeed use.

The front mech hanger and internal routing holes are closed with alloy covers (not rubber plugs) when not in use, and the external gear and brake routing works with singlespeed or 30-speed set-ups alike. The paint job is premium quality and you can choose a colour-matched fork. Then again, at twice the price of other boutique steel frames you should get something pretty damn special.

The kit

Our desert test frame was dressed with a SRAM X1 transmission and Shimano's performance-for-price defining Deore brakes. Schwalbe's versatile Nobby Nic 2.4in tyres showcased the amount of space in the frame and added even more cushioning to the ride. Wheels were the 'great until you lose a loose end cap' Stan's Arch EX 29s, but Niner will soon have their own range of carbon and alloy hoops. Niner also provided the saddle, stem and cunning YAWYD headset cap. Having ridden the RDO with both 710 and 780mm bars we'd definitely go for the latter, especially if you choose a longer-travel fork than the 120mm (4.7in) Pike fitted here.

The ride

If you think steel hardtails are for old farts pottering about telling youngsters that trail centres were better when it was fields, think again. With the back wheel tucked right in under the saddle and the front wheel way out in front, the Niner is a raging wheelie, manual and lip-launching machine.

The super-supple back end sucks up small roots and rocks as though you're running about 10psi. So, while long drags will expose soft pedalling and heavy weight, it claws up tech stuff like a lizard. Going down takes some adjusting to, because the frame twists like a kid trying to use chopsticks. Grip the bar and aim for the exit though, and the ROS dodges through the drama with outstanding speed sustain.

While line holding is approximate rather than laser accurate, the frame compliance gives incredible levels of cornering grip. The longer and harder we rode it, the more we loved the ROS 9's spring-loaded trail swagger and our desert demo backed up the addictively involving, skill-rewarding ride we'd experienced previously on the frame on our home test trails.

MBUK

A heavy, overpriced freak on paper, but the test bike we've wanted to keep more than any other in recent memory

★★★★★


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DEVINCI SPARTAN SX

FRAME 6066-T6 aluminium w/ DMC-G carbon fibre seatstays, 165mm (6.5in) travel **FORK** RockShox Pike RC, 160mm (6.3in) travel **SHOCK** RockShox Monarch Plus RC3 DebonAir **DRIVETRAIN** SRAM X1 (1x11) **WHEELSET** Jalco DD28 rims on Formula hubs, Schwalbe Hans Dampf Super Gravity TrailStar 27.5x2.35in tyres **BRAKES** SRAM Guide R **BAR/STEM** V2 Pro, 780mm/Race Face Chester 50mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** RockShox Reverb Stealth/SDG Fly RL **WEIGHT** 15.09kg//33.27lb (L, with pedals) **PRICE** £4,349 **CONTACT** Haven Distribution www.havendistribution.co.uk

SO GOOD

Super-surefooted, neutrally suspended, lifetime warrantied mini DH machine that's a responsive ripper on the descents

Excellent control-focused spec, even on the cheapest bikes

NO GOOD

Alloy frame, heavy wheel and tyres and stand-up pedal bob make it hard work to get moving

Short reach means you need to size up if you like your bikes long

JARGON BUSTER

Piggyback shock
A shock that uses a supplementary 'piggyback' chamber parallel to the main body to increase oil volume and reduce the effects of heat build-up

This sawn-off shotgun Devinci first appeared under Steve Smith at last year's DH World Championships, then got an official launch as the Spartan at the Enduro World Series round in Scotland. Can it translate Devinci's World Cup success to the trails?

The frame

The Spartan is a buff-looking machine, with a big, sweeping down tube and steep-sloped top tube throwing the frame weight down low around the extra-wide BB. It uses Dave Weagle's wheel-skewering Split Pivot layout, with deep carbon seatstays extending forward to the rear shock and a stout horseshoe linkage pivoting on the kinked seat tube. A small chip adjusts BB height by 7mm and angles by 0.6 degrees. The compact frame means the piggyback Monarch shock has to be inverted and reversed for clearance.

Reach is compact too – the large frame has the top tube length of most medium bikes in its category, which means you'll need to size up to run the short stem it deserves. The biggest problem for the handmade-in-Canada alloy chassis, though, is the otherwise identical carbon frame made in Taiwan. This is 750g lighter (2.8kg vs 3.55kg) and costs just £300 more, whether you're buying a frame (£2,199.99 vs £1,899.99) or one of the four complete bikes. The alloy frame is beautifully built though, and all Devincis get a rare full lifetime warranty.

The kit

Devinci also take a refreshingly essentials-focused approach to their complete bike builds. Every model in the range gets a RockShox Pike fork, Monarch Plus shock and Reverb Stealth post, plus DH-spec Schwalbe Hans Dampf tyres. Apart from the top RR model (which gets a carbon bar and DT wheels) they also use the same pragmatic rather than flashy Formula hub/Jalco rim wheels, Race Face DH stem and 780mm wide V2 Pro bar. That means even the basic Shimano Deore based XP gets arguably the most balanced, consistently controlled damping set-up around and the benchmark dropper post, all glued to the ground with enduro race rubber and a proper power-assist cockpit.

It's a bold approach that goes against the normal price and performance progression model, and – given that Deore is so good – almost discourages you from spending more. That said, one of the overwhelming impressions we got from our desert riding was how positive, punchy and wonderfully simple SRAM's 1x11 transmissions are. We're also becoming big fans of SRAM's Guide brakes.

The ride

Grunting the heavy-tyred, short-reach Spartan up the trails just before dawn wasn't an inspiring start. Getting out of the saddle also produced noticeable bob if we didn't flick the shock into pedal mode. What rapidly became clear, though, was that the Devinci ploughed straight over anything we blundered blindly into. That meant that whatever gap the other bikes in our convoy opened up on the climbs, the Spartan charged shut immediately on the sketchy scree and rut descents or across the numerous rocky outcrops.

As soon as the sun rose enough to carry proper pace and spot race lines early, the Spartan started to show its massive speed potential. The inertia of the heavy tyres and reversed shock is offset by the short chainstays and the DebonAir can retains excellent start sensitivity. The neutral Split Pivot suspension gives impressively



THE ROCK SOLID, 'FLAT OUT, FOOT OUT' RIDE MADE IT ONE OF THE BIKES WE WERE MOST RELUCTANT TO HAND BACK

consistent connection over every size and shape of impact too, whether you're pedalling, braking or recovering from a lung-emptying landing. It carries decent speed through staccato braking hits and square edges without wallowing or spiking but it's still easy to loft the front wheel and manual or launch the whole bike when needed.

In its longest and lowest format, and running the low pressures the reinforced tyres allow, the Devinci is defiantly surefooted, no matter how sketchy the surface. Push it to the limit and the front end stays locked solid on to the trail while the super-short back end kicks out in a feelgood speedway flare that fired showers of rocks over Russ, our photographer, with remarkable accuracy. Despite screaming legs it was always worth finding the extra wattage to earn another descent and the rock solid, 'flat out, foot out' ride of the Spartan made it one of the bikes we were most reluctant to hand back after our time in the desert. »

MBUK

A proper mini DH bike for the fastest, gnarliest runs. The carbon version offers even better performance and value though







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FELT COMPULSION 10

FRAME Hydroformed double-butted 6061 aluminium, 160mm (6.3in) travel **FORK** RockShox Pike RCT3 Solo Air, 160mm (6.3in) travel **SHOCK** RockShox Monarch Plus RC3 **DRIVETRAIN** SRAM X01 w/ Race Face Turbine cranks (1x11) **WHEELSET** WTB KOM i23 rims on Novatec hubs, Schwalbe Hans Dampf (F) and Rock Razor (R) Performance 27.5x2.35in tyres **BRAKES** SRAM Guide RSC **BAR/STEM** Felt MTB carbon, 760mm/Felt MTB 3D forged, 60mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** KS LEV/WTB Volt Cro Mo **WEIGHT** 13.07kg/28.81lb (L, with pedals) **PRICE** £3,799 **CONTACT** Saddleback www.saddleback.co.uk

SO GOOD

Lightweight alloy frame makes for carbon-competitive weight

Equilink suspension gives tight pedalling traction for excellent climbing performance

NO GOOD

Flex and tall ride height undermine cornering and ragged edge confidence

Rear suspension reacts to big, fast stuff more like a 140mm bike than a 160mm machine

JARGON BUSTER

Dropper post
A telescopic seatpost that you can lower for easy body movement on technical sections and then raise for efficient pedalling

While Felt are still focused mainly on triathlon and road bikes, their hiring of old-school DH legend Scott Sharples has added some genuine gravity to their off-road family. That's clearest on the thoroughly overhauled Compulsion, which now matches 160mm (6.3in) of travel with 650b wheels and – equally importantly – slacker angles and a longer reach than its previous uptight incarnations.

The frame

The trend for shorter and shorter stems means reach is becoming increasingly important. While the Felt isn't as long as the Giant, it's OK for the supplied 70mm stem. The medium frame is a lot shorter than the large we tested though, so if you're after a long bike be prepared to straddle the tall top tube of a bigger size.

While carbon mainframes are becoming common at £4,000-plus, the Felt gets a full-alloy chassis. But at well under 2.7kg (6lb), it's lighter than several comparable composite frames. The bottom bracket is a durable threaded external unit and the cables and hoses are all routed externally for easy access. The lack of ISCG chain guide mounts is an oversight on an enduro bike though.

While twin top and bottom linkages are a common way to join a fixed swingarm to a mainframe, Felt are unique in adding a rear pivot to cope with the differing leverage rates. Their forged figure-of-eight dropout design puts the pivot knuckle about 4cm above the 142x12mm rear axle so that it clears the post-mount brake. They also tie the two linkages together with a solid 'Equilink' strut, which is a real ride definer – as we'll see later.

The kit

When it comes to easy set-up and standout control, nothing beats RockShox's Pike RCT3 and Monarch Plus RC3 double act. The long-stroke shock keeps leverage ratios manageable and Felt have stayed with a conventional air can rather than a larger-volume DebonAir sleeve.

SRAM provide the 11-speed X01 gears and top-of-the-range Guide RSC brakes too, though initial power leverage comes from a single-ring Race Face Turbine crankset. The externally routed KS LEV is a slightly odd choice given that the frame is ported for 'stealth' droppers. Cockpit kit is Felt's own-brand gear, including a 760mm carbon bar.

Novatec's bombproof hubs provide the centrepiece to the new KOM version of WTB's i23 rims, which are claimed to offer the same 'carbon competitive performance at an alloy price' benefits as the frame. Schwalbe's Hans Dampf tyre adds all-weather steering grip up front while a semi-slick Rock Razor speeds up back end business.

The ride

With its carbon-style weight and fast rear tyre the Compulsion is naturally responsive to propulsion, but its suspension is tailored towards pedalling and climbing too. By tying the two linkages together and preventing them being splayed apart by pedal torque, the Equilink subtly stiffens the suspension to keep the already short rear end tucked in.

While a slightly modified Equilink relationship means the 2015 bike isn't as aggressively pedal-reactive as previous versions, it still pulls forward and down into any undulation for outstanding climbing grip. The high BB means excellent pedal clearance »



IT'S NATURALLY RESPONSIVE TO PROPULSION, BUT ITS SUSPENSION IS TAILORED TOWARDS PEDALLING AND CLIMBING TOO

too, so you can keep on torquing up technical slopes where you'd be pushing most of its long-travel peers. It singletracks really well too, with a consistently tight rather than wallowy feel from the RockShox suspension. There's none of the excess rebound bounce of Felt's carbon flex-stay bikes either, so set-up is simple.

Heading back down, the 66-degree head angle throws the wheel out a long way in front for easy self-correcting stability. It's certainly not a super-plush, ground sucking bomber that'll push your gravity riding to new levels, but it's capable enough to keep descending fun. Cornering isn't as convincing though, because the tall BB and high-riding suspension leave you feeling perched on top of the bike rather than hammocked into it. The lightweight frame is noticeably flexible too, but because it bends and twists throughout its length rather than in one particular point, this manifests itself more as a background steering and line holding softness than a specific handling issue. »

MBUK

Felt's most capable, enjoyable descender yet, but still more climbing and XC orientated than its travel would suggest

★★★☆☆

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GIANT REIGN ADVANCED 27.5 1

FRAME Advanced carbon fibre w/ ALUXX SL aluminium rear, 160mm (6.3in) travel **FORK** RockShox Pike RC Dual Position Air, 130-160mm (5.1-6.3in) travel, **SHOCK** RockShox Monarch Plus DebonAir **DRIVETRAIN** Shimano SLX w/ MRP 2x chain guide, Shimano XT rear mech **WHEELSET** Giant P-AM2 rims on Giant Tracker (F) and DT Swiss 350 (R) hubs, Schwalbe Magic Mary SnakeSkin TrailStar (F) and Hans Dampf SnakeSkin PaceStar (R) 27.5x2.35in tyres **BRAKES** Shimano XT **BAR/STEM** Giant Contact SL DH, 800mm/Truvativ Holzfeller, 60mm **SEATPOST/SADDLE** RockShox Reverb Stealth/Giant Contact Upright **WEIGHT** 13.94kg/30.73lb (L, with pedals) **PRICE** £3,299 **CONTACT** Giant www.giant-bicycles.com

SO GOOD

Super-surefooted ride with confidently slack yet laser accurate handling

Mixed material frame, durable suspension hardware and cost-effective spec make it top value

NO GOOD

If you've got the grunt, a mid-sized single ring works better with the system Maestro than a double

Custom fork offset feels weird at first and we never used the travel adjuster

JARGON BUSTER

DebonAir
RockShox's new extra-volume air can option for the Monarch shock, which creates a more supple positive and negative spring for a super-smooth start to the stroke

The Reign has always been a solid long-travel option, but it didn't even appear in the Giant range last year. Instead, the 160mm (6.3in) travel gap was sort of filled by long-forked SX versions of the 140mm Trance (there's still one £2,899 SX for 2015). Giant spent the gap year making sure that the Reign's switch to 650b wheels went as smoothly as possible, and the new bike is an interesting mix of proven practicality and subtle innovation.

The frame

Giant's totally in-house built carbon front triangle and alloy rear end (they claim sub 2.3kg/5lb, without shock) keep the whole bike remarkably light and responsive. The increasingly copied trick of using an alloy back end adds very little weight, improves durability and makes for extremely aggressive pricing too.

Giant's bearing and frame longevity is excellent, and the Reign has reverted to a conventional tapered head tube up front (rather than the brand's oversized OverDrive 2 set-up) for easy fork or stem upgrading. The internal cable routing has a single port on each side, which keeps lines clean even with UK brake set-up. The relatively long rear end gives good tyre clearance too.

The kit

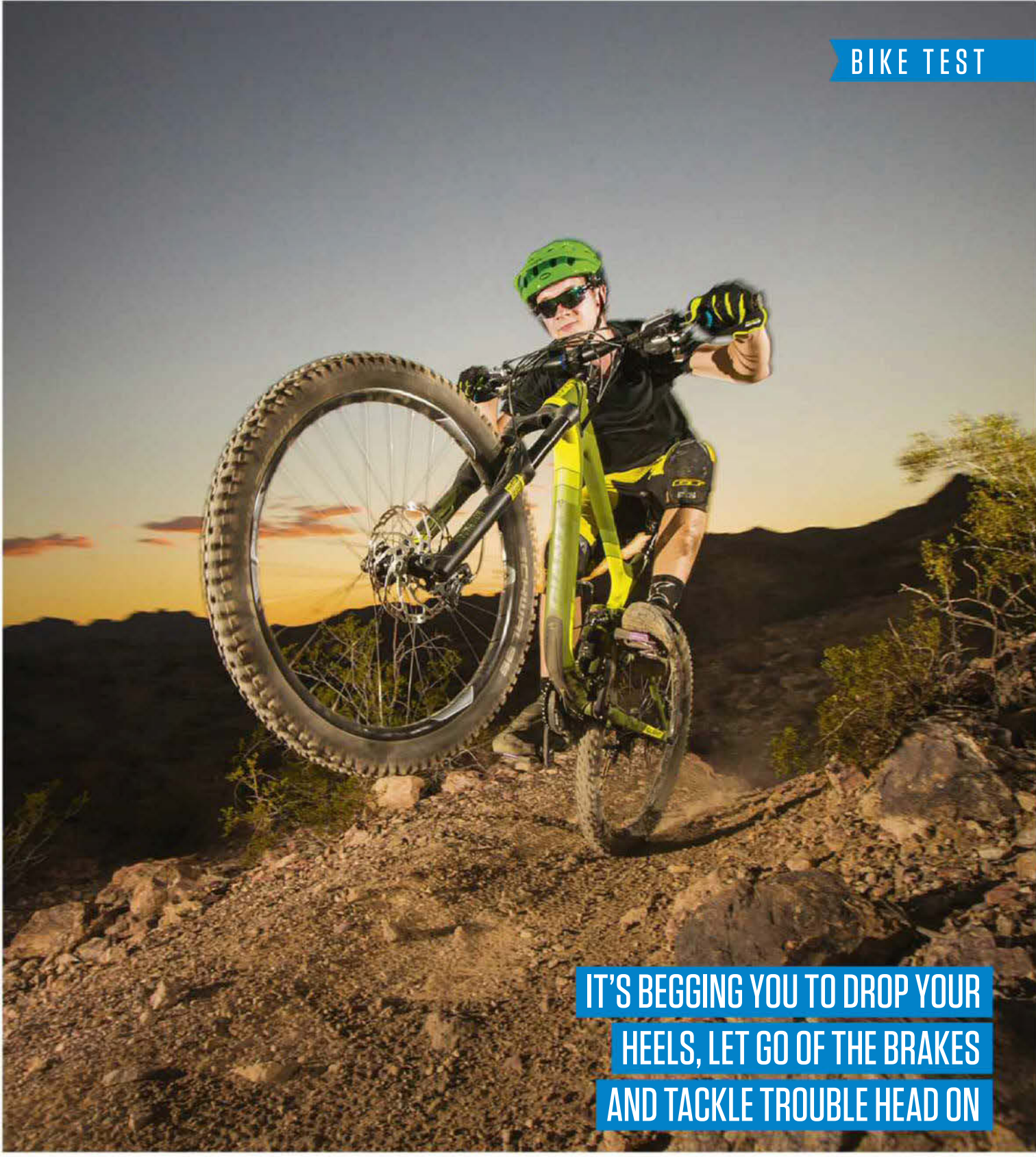
As ever, the RockShox Pike fork and Monarch Plus shock combo provides impeccable 'get on and go' control without needing a degree in damping adjustment or chassis dynamics. Interestingly, Giant have worked with RockShox to create a custom fork offset on the Pike that slightly reduces front wheel wobble and wandering on steep climbs. They've also specced a Dual Position Air fork that can drop to 130mm (5.1in) of travel to steepen the front end further. It seems a bit of a belt-and-braces approach, but the UK is way ahead of the rest of the world in terms of handling tastes and as Giant have to sell this bike globally, a pure 65-degree head angle would probably be a step too far.

What really matters is that after a slight readjustment period you'll realise there's still a ton of downhill bike style confidence in the front end, especially as it's working with the grip of a Schwalbe Magic Mary tyre at one end and a monster 800mm wide bar at the top. Again that's a ballsy move by a big company, so respect to Giant for thinking 'if it's too wide, cut it down', rather than cramping the style of the Reign with a skinny bar. Add a RockShox Reverb Stealth dropper post plus a cost effective mix of Shimano stop-and-go gear and own-brand componentry, and the carbon-fronted Reign is excellent value.

The ride

Once you're used to the 'doesn't steer quite as slackly as it feels' sensation, the Reign's handling and ride position are excellent. Most riders will probably chop the vast bar down for tree clearance but it's great to have the option of maximum leverage. As well as the widest bar on test, the Giant also had the longest top tube of any large sized bike we tested at Interbike, which immediately sits you securely between both wheels. Add the raked-out front end plus totally neutral, well balanced suspension feel and it's begging you to drop your heels, let go of the brakes and tackle trouble head on.

Giant have hopped up the already super-plush performance of the Monarch shock's extra-volume DebonAir air sleeve with another neat feature too. Rather than a standard



IT'S BEGGING YOU TO DROP YOUR HEELS, LET GO OF THE BRAKES AND TACKLE TROUBLE HEAD ON

solid-state bushing at the top of the shock, there's a cartridge bearing to match the super-supple movement of the shared lower linkage and bottom shock mount axle. The result is an initial stroke that's so smooth we kept double-checking the air pressure. The well-metered compression and Rapid Recovery rebound damping kept the rear shock consistently controlled through the mid stroke though, only pushing through to maximum travel when totally necessary.

The long wheelbase and impressive stiffness right through the frameset keep it locked on target on seriously random trails too. This was a genuine lifesaver on the super-steep scree trails we faced when we first rode the Reign at its official launch in Canada, and it's a great confidence builder if you're new to big bikes and black runs. More dynamic riders will have to get busy with the rear brake to snap the relatively long 'kite tail' back end out though.

Unsurprisingly, the super-supple shock needs toggling into 'pedal' mode to stop wallowing under power – especially in the small chainring.

Low weight – especially for its cost and confidence – means the Reign is no slouch on the climbs though, and if you're trying to tickle it round a lot of tight uphill turns you'll appreciate the tweaked steering too. All this means it looks set to be one of the standout top value aggro all-rounders of the year. »

MBUK

A super-confident black run bomber or enduro racer that still climbs well – and costs less than you'd expect

FINAL OPINION

By the time we get to Interbike we know what next year's headline bikes are going to be, thanks to product launches throughout the summer and the Eurobike show a few weeks before. But getting to ride these machines on the same trails puts any expectations under intense and sometimes surprising real-world riding scrutiny.

It also brings home just how good most bikes are now. While they're not perfect, Scott's Genius LT 700 Tuned, Felt's Compulsion 10 and Specialized's Camber Expert Carbon Evo are in the best shape they've ever been in. And even though Devinci's alloy Spartan would only make sense to the most patriotic Canadian or composite cynic, it's still a rock-solid mini DH/enduro bomber and the carbon version should be brilliant.

The two bikes that left us with the best memories from Bootleg Canyon couldn't be more different though. Niner's ROS 9 hardcore hardtail is an unapologetic ferrous freak that bends the rules on trail rioting as much as it bends its own frame to manage it. Giant's Reign, on the other hand, tempers downhill geometry with subtle singletrack and climb taming tweaks and delivers an outstandingly well priced, versatile and vastly fun example of everything that's going to be great about mountain biking in 2015.



SUMMARY



SPECIALIZED CAMBER EXPERT CARBON EVO £4,500

A super-versatile 29er, but not cheap and needs changes to unleash its EVO potential



SCOTT GENIUS LT 700 TUNED £5,599

More secure, engaging and fun for 2015, without compromising its lightweight climbing and XC abilities



NINER ROS 9 £899 (frame only)

A heavy, overpriced freak on paper, but the test bike we've wanted to keep more than any other in recent memory



DEVINCI SPARTAN SX £4,349

A proper mini DH bike for the fastest, gnarliest runs – but the carbon version offers better performance and value



FELT COMPULSION 10 £3,799

Felt's most enjoyable descender yet, but still more climbing and XC orientated than its travel would suggest



GIANT REIGN ADVANCED 27.5 1 £,3299

A super-confident black run bomber or enduro racer that still climbs well – and costs less than you'd expect

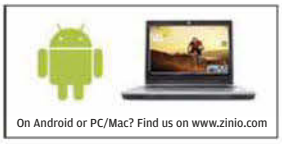
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WATERPROOF JACKETS

A good waterproof is an essential, and will keep you warm and dry so you can hit the trails in comfort, whatever the weather

Words & Pics Russell Burton



HOOD
A must if you're out all day on remote trails or want a jacket that doubles up off the bike. We like them cut to go over a helmet.

SHAPED SLEEVES
Cut to follow the position of your arms when riding, they make for a sleeker profile that won't billow like a sail on descents.

ZIP-PULLS
A pet point of ours – longer zip-pulls (the bit used to open and close the zip) are much easier to grab with gloved hands.

WATERPROOF ZIPS
No more leaky pockets! Identified by the rubberised teeth covering, waterproof zips also make for less bulky jackets.

FABRIC
From ultralight breathable materials to heavier, more durable ones, there's a waterproof fabric for every riding style.

What to look for

How to pick out a great jacket

A WATERPROOF JACKET is fundamental to winter riding – and much of spring and autumn too if you live in the UK – but as they range in price from little more than the cost of a jersey to the most expensive piece of clothing you might own (ever), it can be a hard call. If the budget option will still keep you dry, why pay more?

Broadly speaking, the more you spend, the more you get, in terms of quality of fabric and features. Lightweight, extra durable or more breathable waterproof materials cost more to manufacture. Adding extra pockets, zips and detailing increases production costs too, so it helps to think about the sort of riding you do and what your requirements are.

If your style is blasting XC trails, travelling fast and light, then we'd recommend saving up your pennies and going for a top-notch fabric such as Gore-Tex Active in a slimmer cut with pared down details to maximise breathability. On the other hand, if uplift days at the bike park are your thing, breathability won't be so much of an issue, but a tough, durable fabric and construction will be. If your fun is to be had heading out for epic all-day rides, or you want a jacket for commuting and off-the-bike use as well, then you'll want the best of both worlds – something with a roomy (but not baggy) cut that allows for more layering, plus extra pockets and possibly a hood.

But what if your performance aspirations and your budget don't



quite match? Say extra pockets, a hood and a fleece-lined collar are non-negotiable, but you also want out-of-price-range breathability? Well, you can't make a less breathable material more so, but you can help things along. To start with, look for vents – jackets often have zips at the front, under the armpits or on the sleeves that you can open up on climbs or when you're working hard to increase airflow. The other trick is to layer properly. Wearing wicking clothes under your waterproof means that sweat can be whisked away from your skin (which is what makes you feel cold when you stop) and transferred through to your jacket.

Once you've got those variables sorted it's simple. Buy a jacket that fits – skinny go-faster styles will always look a little weird in the mirror, but are transformed in the riding position so try them on a bike. With more relaxed styles, check the jacket doesn't bag annoyingly at the front when you're riding. And last but not least, make sure it's long enough in the back and arms when you're in the riding position.

»

MBUK Ratings

WE BASE OUR SCORES ON VALUE FOR MONEY AND PERFORMANCE

★★★★★ **EXCEPTIONAL:** A genuine class leader

★★★★☆ **VERY GOOD:** One of the best you can buy

★★★☆☆ **GOOD:** It'll do the job and do it well

★★☆☆☆ **BELOW AVERAGE:** Flawed in some way

★☆☆☆☆ **POOR:** Simply put, don't bother!



THE TESTER

Russell Burton
As a regular *MBUK* photographer, Russell spends almost all day, every day outside, and when he's not snapping, he's on a bike. He's got strong opinions about riding kit – but loves to be surprised too.

HOW WE TESTED THEM

THERE'S NO ESCAPING the fact that to test waterproof jackets you've got to do a lot of riding in the rain. But on the plus side, it does remind us that getting out there in the right kit always beats sitting around at home, no matter what the weather.

Fresh from the packaging, we always first check the fit, because what looks great in the mirror doesn't necessarily work when you're stretched out on the bike, or indeed the other way round. Once out on the trail it's all about the functionality of the fabric together with the quality and practicality of the jacket's construction. Wherever possible we try to stick to the same trail for the first wearing of all the jackets in order to fairly replicate the same combination of climbing, descending and flat-out pedalling time.

After that it's out on our travels for the sort of extended use that quickly shows up any shortcomings in performance. The final thing we look at is how all those elements roll up into value for money. Even if your budget is unlimited, you want to make sure it's a wise investment.



JARGON BUSTER

> Dropped tail
An extra-long back section that extends over the back of the saddle. Some jackets have a fold-up version that tucks away when you don't need it – useful if your coat does street duty too.

> Four-way stretch
A fabric that stretches in all directions for easy movement.

> Mesh lining
These tend to be used inside coated fabrics to protect them from wear. They also help the wicking process (transfer of sweat away from the skin), but do add some extra weight and bulk to the jacket.

> Offset zip
Moving the front zip from the centre to the side reduces the amount of windchill directly through the front, and when positioned well sits the zip away from the chin too.

> Pit zips
Neatly named vertical zips that run under the armpits and down the side of the jacket and can be opened up for extra ventilation.

> Two-layer fabric
One that has no backing finish to the waterproof coating inside. It makes for a lighter jacket but can feel slightly rubbery.

> Waterproof zip
The old way to stop wind and rain coming in through the zip was to use a storm flap either in front of or behind it. Waterproof zips have done away with the need for these, so they reduce weight and bulk too. They can be a bit stiff to open and close, so don't tug at them.

> Zip garage/port
A flap of material that covers the top of the zip to stop you catching your neck/beard in it.



Dakine Caliber

£145 Dakine **www.dakine.com**

JACKETS CAN SOMETIMES look underwhelming on the shelf but come to life when you're wearing them, and the Caliber does exactly that. The straight cut is the right side of relaxed rather than baggy, and it has the appeal of a casual jacket. But with its properly shaped shoulders and long back, it's transformed when you jump on a bike. The two-layer fabric does have that slightly rubbery feel on the inside but there's no rustling when you move and it has a reassuring rugged quality. There are two handwarmer pockets and one on the chest – a configuration we like in a jacket that we know we'll spend as much time hanging around in as riding in – and although it isn't as highly breathable as more expensive styles, there are long pit zips to help cool you down.

MBUK ★★★☆☆



Polaris Summit

£99.99 Polaris **www.polaris-apparel.co.uk**

WE EXPECTED A more basic jacket for £100 but the Summit is well specified in terms of features. A hood that packs away into the collar makes it more versatile and there's a decent size back pocket. The length hasn't been skimped on either – it's long enough through the back even on tall riders, and though the relaxed cut would benefit from a touch of refinement, it does allow plenty of room for movement and extra layers. The main trade-off is breathability, and we did find this jacket noticeably warm. Luckily there are generous vents, which do help. If you have a keen eye on your budget and need a robust waterproof that might do double duty for commuting as well as trail riding, it's worth taking a look at the Summit.

MBUK ★★★☆☆



Showers Pass Double Century EX

£125 Showers Pass **www.showerspass.com**

WE'VE BEEN FANS of Showers Pass for a while. The US brand understand our rain and aren't too pricey either, and their kit's now more widely available in the UK. The company was founded on the needs of bike commuters and that's evident in the Double Century. There's a lot of reflective detailing, the cut is boxy and the sleeves are very wide – which does give you lots of room to layer over everyday clothes but means that when you hit the trails you'll need to adjust the cuffs right in, and we weren't keen on the folds that creates for water to run into. There are good pit zips and a floating back yoke to increase airflow when the going gets warm. All in all, this is a more traditional style that may not appeal to all mountain bikers but does do 'sensible' very well.

MBUK ★★★☆☆



Race Face Team Chute

£169.95 Silverfish **www.silverfish-uk.com**

IN CASE IT'S passed you by, neon colours are HUGE on the mountain bike scene this year, and if anyone could make hi-vis desirable, it was a sure bet it would be Race Face. (Note to more retiring types – this jacket does come in black too.) The material used on the Team Chute has a robust, substantial feel and the well designed shape of the hood and collar give a properly protected feel. That's underlined by a relaxed fit that'll go over everything, a lower cut back and the comfort of a fleece-lined collar. For all that 'constructed' quality, the jacket is surprisingly soft and flexible to wear, not advertising its durable nature with a crackle at every turn. It is warm though, and we found ourselves making maximum use of the pit zips.

MBUK ★★★½☆

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Altura Attack 360

£149.99 Zyro **www.zyro.co.uk**



THE ATTACK IS becoming somewhat of a classic. It's a jacket that we associate with long days out on the trails of the sort that involve an exposed route, multiple puncture opportunities and questionable weather. Made from a three-layer fabric that rides lighter than it feels due to strategically placed inserts, it's solidly specified and won't let you down. We know we bang on about sleeves, but the well-cut shape of them on this jacket confirms that you don't have to settle for less at lower price points and it's emphasised by snug inner cuffs. The detailing is great too – an over-helmet hood, long back hem, generous front and rear pockets, plus an elegant collar profile. The Attack may not be as breathable as other jackets but it's durable and won't break the bank.

MBUK ★★★½☆

Mavic Stratos H2O

£270 Mavic **www.mavic.co.uk**



OFFSET ZIPS ARE regarded by some as a design affectation, but done properly they deflect windchill and stop you snagging your chin, without unbalancing the jacket when undone. Mavic get it just right, along with other well thought through features on the Stratos. The cut is impeccable and delivers a jacket that doesn't move around. We like the generous vents too – especially the option to open the main zip for maximum air intake, while a zipped mesh section continues to hold the jacket shut. The fabric isn't the quietest but is durable without being heavy. Opening the two vertical zips at the back creates more room inside the jacket so you can pull it on without having to remove your pack, adding to the list of features that make this our enduro choice.

MBUK ★★★½☆

Scott Trail MTN 10

£250 Scott Sports **www.scott-sports.com**



THE TRAIL HAS the feel of an all-purpose active jacket that's good on the bike – which isn't a criticism, more a take on its versatility. There's room to add extra layers when you're not riding, but it doesn't feel baggy when you're down to a baselayer and a jersey. That's probably down to the decent amount of adjustment – with a cinchable hood, drawcord hem and long cuff tabs you can tweak the fit to suit. The three-layer fabric uses a Gore-Tex Active membrane and has a durable feel. The jacket is highly breathable even on warmer days, and should you need to increase airflow, the long front pockets are lined with mesh so they can act as vents too. Worried about the contents falling out? Don't be – the right-hand one has a cunning pocket-within-a-pocket construction.

MBUK ★★★★☆

Sweet Protection Delirious

£239.99 Sweet Protection **www.sweetprotection.com**



THE DELIRIOUS IS one of a few lightweight, packable jackets included in this test, and though it's minimal in terms of features, it doesn't feel like it's skimped on cut in order to make the grade. An easy fit allows insulation to be added as needed, and though that means it isn't a skinny, race-ready style, the combination of a more relaxed cut and the lightweight ripstop fabric means it delivers a better level of performance in more regular styling. Not that it ignores bike style – a dropped tail and long zip-pulls are the details that matter, and crucially waterproofing comes courtesy of Gore-Tex Active, which provides outstanding breathability. It's not a cheap jacket but you won't need a separate windproof, it packs down and is wearable for other outdoor fun.

MBUK ★★★★☆



Pearl Izumi PRO Aero WxB

£119.99 Madison **www.madison.co.uk**

IF YOU LOVE pockets, a hood and a few bells and whistles, then the PRO Aero probably isn't the jacket for you, but we found its unassuming style grew on us. With no hood, no pockets and a slim (but not skinny) cut it's beautifully minimal, but it's not completely lacking in features. A long zip-pull, chin guard, stretch cuffs and an elastic back are small details that add a lot of comfort. But the key difference here is that it doesn't feel like you're wearing a separate outer layer – the fabric is soft and the cut so good (the shape of the sleeves deserves a special mention) that it feels more like you're wearing a jersey than a jacket. It's small enough to be packable but the barely-there feel means that we reckon the PRO Aero will be worn more than it's stowed.

MBUK ★★★★☆



Sugoi RSX NeoShell

£269.99 Cycling Sports Group UK **www.cyclingsportsgroup.co.uk**

THE RSX IS all about the fabric. Polartec NeoShell was developed to be highly breathable in all conditions – the buzz phrase is 'climate control', meaning you're not forever taking your jacket on and off with changing weather/levels of exertion. And while it clearly doesn't come cheap, we've been quietly impressed with the material's performance in a range of conditions, with it not overheating and not getting wet either. The construction is of a high standard and includes details such as a removable hood, reflective trim and soft-lined collar. The cut is easy enough that you can layer up as the weather gets colder. Our only niggle is that we'd like to see a touch more sleek refinement on a jacket at this price and performance level. At £270, we think it's OK to be fussy.

MBUK ★★★★☆



Specialized Evolution

£220 Specialized **www.specialized.com**

PROOF THAT THE combination of a great fit and a top-notch fabric are all you ever need, the Evolution is brilliant in its simplicity. Made from Gore-Tex Active, which combines guaranteed waterproofing with superb breathability, it still packs small enough to tuck into a jersey pocket. The cut doesn't look like it'll suit everyone's needs, with the extreme dropped tail and slim fit seeming to put it firmly in the XC race category. But since unpacking it we've been wearing this jacket a lot across a wide variety of riding and have never found it wanting. Anything with this level of breathability seems to top £200 so it's not expensive in its class and it's slim enough for road use if you're looking for something that looks at home there too.

MBUK ★★★★☆



Berghaus Vapour Storm

£250 Berghaus **www.berghaus.com**

DESIGNED BY BERGHAUS'S leading-edge MtnHaus development team, the Vapor Storm has been engineered for high-energy multi-sport use. Although it's not MTB-specific, because it has the notion of active performance at its core, there are none of the usual compromises you have to make when going for the 'one jacket for all' option. The breathability comes courtesy of the Gore-Tex Active waterproof fabric plus a series of always-open vents to promote airflow, and it really works. The fit is looser than a dedicated bike jacket, but it manages not to feel too bulky whether you layer up heavily or strip down. The hood goes over your helmet and the back is long enough too. Our only tiny quibble is that the material is loud when new – but worry not, it quietens down with use.

MBUK ★★★★½

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Gore Oxygen 2.0 Gore-Tex Active

£209.99 Gore Apparel **www.goreapparel.co.uk**

SINCE IT'S RARE we give anything a five, you should understand that the Gore Oxygen 2.0 is quite simply outstanding. This is the result when the key elements of waterproofing, breathability and fit come together perfectly, yet there's still more to this fantastic jacket. But let's start with the fabric. Unsurprisingly (given that this is a jacket from Gore), it's the highly breathable Gore-Tex Active, which is designed for highly aerobic activity. The membrane itself is accompanied by a standard set for construction that demands minimal design, with any superfluous seams or detailing affecting its performance. As you might expect then, the Oxygen 2.0 has a very clean look – no pockets, no hood – though the zipped jersey-style rear pockets and cuffs that zip closed for a slim fit suddenly make Velcro and elastic look clunky. The neck is near perfect – ergonomically cut to sit in just the right position when you're riding and with a soft upper edge that forms a comfortable seal without making you feel all buttoned up, even when you are. It complements the soft feel that the jacket has overall. There's a long back hem with light gripper to keep it in place, but best of all in terms of the cut, when you move your arms, the body of the jacket stays put, with no shifting around or riding up. That slight movement is a given on most jackets, so when it doesn't happen, it's a revelation.

MBUK ★★★★★



Endura MTR Emergency Shell

£89.99 Endura **www.endura.co.uk**

EVERYONE KNOWS YOU should pack a jacket on every ride, but finding the right combination of performance, weight and waterproof protection that hits the price point of a 'just in case' jacket always felt a compromise. But we can honestly say that since first trying the MTR, we've never left home without it – and neither should you. The styling is pared back simplicity, with clean lines and a slim cut that manages not to feel restrictive thanks to stretch inserts where you need them. The fabric is two-layer and extremely light. You wouldn't expect it to be as durable as tougher finishes but ours, at over a year old, is still holding up well. A small elastic loop keeps the jacket rolled up neatly in the smallest corner of your pack, and at 135g you certainly won't notice the weight.

MBUK ★★★★☆



Mission Workshop Orion

£300 Mission Workshop **www.missionworkshop.com**

WE CALLED THIS jacket an "immaculate combination of performance and style" last year and commented that it seemed to have been made without compromise. For that reason you'd think the Orion couldn't be improved, but the switch to Polartec NeoShell fabric means that the 2014 version packs that same performance punch at a lighter weight. There's an ease to the slim cut that's enhanced by stretch in the material itself and it has all the detailing you need and none that you don't. The zip-pulls are generous and the pockets numerous but not obtrusive and all secured with waterproof zips. The breathability is as good as we've quickly come to expect from this fabric, and although we're loving the hit of colour, if you're after something quieter it does come in black too.

MBUK ★★★★½

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P136 HOW TO...

BE A TRAIL HERO, pt5

We show you how to conquer common obstacles on blue, red and black routes



P142 GRIMETIME

How to silence your ride – we show you how to get rid of those nasty creaks and groans



P144 ASK MBUK

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P152 WRECKING CREW

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An epic search for the ultimate descent in Kintail, Scotland. Plus pull-out route maps!

MBUK'S ROUTE EXPERT



All our route maps are put together by route guru **Max Darkins**. Max loves travelling the country in search of the best trails and is also the man behind **www.roughride guide.co.uk**.



TRAIL GRADINGS EXPLAINED

For safety reasons, trail centre routes are marked using a similar system to that used in skiing. Gradings vary from green to black, and in this series we're focusing on features found on blue, red and black trails.

BLUE Require basic off-road skills. Expect rocks, roots and occasional steep berms.

RED Not for beginners. You'll need good riding skills to tackle obstacles and technical sections that can include jumps, drops and gaps.

BLACK High skill level required. Expect steep slopes, technical terrain and treacherous features.

TRANSFORM INTO A...

TRAIL HERO

PART FIVE

SHOW ROCKS WHO'S BOSS AND LEARN TO PUMP FOR FREE SPEED

Words Joe Rafferty **Pics** Steve Behr



PART FIVE LEARN HOW TO:

- **BLUE** PUMP THE TRAIL FOR FREE SPEED
- **RED** TACKLE STEEP ROCK SLABS AND ROLL-INS
- **BLACK** STAY SMOOTH THROUGH ROCK GARDENS

In the fifth and final part of this series we're showing you two different ways to ride pump bumps and gain speed. These skills aren't just limited to blue trails, and they're certainly not just for beginners either. Once you've nailed pumping on simple bumps, have a go on some natural or ungraded trails and see how much free speed you can pick up – good riders pump through roots, undulations and rocks so they can maintain speed and limit pedalling in the rough.

For this month's red and black trail techniques we're looking at steep rock slabs and gnarly rock gardens. Rock features can be daunting, but if you know where to keep your weight and how to let the bike move about underneath you, you'll soon look at them in a different light.



YOUR TUTORS

Pro Ride Guides are a team of professional mountain bike skills coaches, Elite level enduro and DH racers and adventurers led by Joe Rafferty. If you want more speed and confidence, or just to look better on your bike, then check out **www.prorideguides.com**.

PUMP BUMPS

Pump bumps are small rollers that can be a single lump or a series of undulations. What makes them different from jumps is that they're generally on sections of trail that are quite slow, so it's better to pump them to gain speed rather than try to jump them. Pumping is a way of generating speed from the trail without pedalling. It's a simple concept – apply pressure to a downslope and you'll gain forwards momentum. At steady speeds you can pump small bumps with both wheels on the ground, but at faster speeds it can be better to let the front wheel come off the ground (a move known as a 'manual') and pump with the rear wheel only.

TRAIL GRADINGS EXPLAINED

BLUE
MODERATE

Blue routes require basic off-road skills and are the most common trails for novices. There'll be more rocks, roots and singletrack than on a beginner green trail, and there may be steep berms too.



PUMP IT



1 **ABSORB THE UPSLOPE** Just before the front wheel hits the upslope, compress the bike into the ground and bend your arms and legs so the bike can change angle and is light on the upslope.

MANUAL PUMP IT



APPROACH You should be in your neutral position, with your weight through your feet and your hands light. A bit of speed will definitely help, but keep it under control. Spot the upslope so you can work out your timing, then look down the trail – and always cover both brakes.

1 **MANUAL** As the front wheel reaches the bottom of the upslope, compress the front of the bike and push it forwards to lift the wheel off the ground. The aim is to get the wheel high and avoid it touching the ground until you're over the top of the bump.

ROCK STEPS

Steep rock slabs and roll-ins are common on many red trails. They're generally found on slower, more technical trails rather than fast flowing ones, and most of the time there'll be an option to duck round them – a lot of riders fear going over the handlebar, especially on big drops. Controlling your speed and adjusting your body position correctly will keep you safe and make the transition from flat to steep smooth and balanced, meaning you'll be able to maintain control. Momentum can certainly help if you become unbalanced, but we recommend starting at a slow pace so you can feel your balance on the bike before progressing to bigger rock slabs.





1 **STAY LOW ON APPROACH** Look for a straight, clean line and control your entry speed so you're approaching the slab with enough pace to remain in balance. Stand up on the pedals and get a little bit lower on the bike by lowering your chest toward the bar.

2 **TRANSITION TO STEEP** As the front wheel transitions from flat to steep, allow your arms to extend and bend your knees so the bike can change angle while your upper body remains at the same angle. The bike will effectively pivot underneath you.







2 **PUMP** You'll now be in a compressed position on top of the first bump. Just as your rear wheel clears the upslope, push with your legs to pump the downslope. Timing is essential here.

3 **ABSORB** If you're tackling a series of bumps, allow your legs and arms to bend again so you can absorb the upslope of the next bump. You'll know if your timing is out because you'll lose speed.

4 **PUMP** Push hard with your legs into the downslope to generate as much speed as you can. Using your legs as much as possible will help you generate better power.







2 **ABSORB** With the front wheel clear of the upslope and in the air, and your arms extended, you now need to absorb the upslope with the rear wheel. Allow your knees to bend as you feel the rear wheel hit the upslope.

3 **PUMP** Just as the rear wheel clears the upslope, push down with your feet on to the downslope while still holding the front wheel up. Transferring your weight on to the rear wheel and downslope will increase your speed.

4 **ABSORB** As the rear wheel reaches the next upslope, allow it to come up between your legs and the bike to level out, then repeat steps 2-4. When you reach the final downslope, let the front wheel drop and, if there's space, pump for extra speed.





3 **WEIGHT OVER BB** Keep your body weight supported by pushing your heels down, and look up. If your weight is over the bottom bracket then you're in a safe place. The bike should be in front of you and the saddle will have moved forwards between your legs.

4 **TRANSITION TO FLAT** Allow the bike to level out by extending your legs and letting your arms bend so you return to your neutral position. If there's enough grip, you can drag the brakes evenly from start to finish to control your speed.

TRAIL GRADINGS EXPLAINED

RED

DIFFICULT

Not for beginners. You'll need good riding skills to tackle the various obstacles and technical sections. Can involve some jumps, drops and gaps.

PROGRESSION

If you feel like your body weight is being thrown forwards while tackling a slab, you're doing something wrong – and you should look to correct it before moving on to bigger features. It may be that you're not letting the bike pitch forwards on the transition or that you have too much weight on your hands when the bike changes angle.

TRAIL GRADINGS EXPLAINED

BLACK
SEVERE

Pretty much anything goes. Expect steep slopes, technical terrain and treacherous features, including large gap jumps and unavoidable drops.



SPEED CONTROL

Suspension works better when you don't drag the brakes, but it's essential you keep your speed in control relative to the roughness and exit. Many riders make the mistake of carrying too much speed in, then slowing down in the rock garden. Enter slowly and exit faster for a smoother ride.

BODY POSITION

Keep your head up and use your peripheral vision to time any movements. Your arms and legs should be bent, your heels down and your hands light on the bar. The steeper the slope, the more you'll have to lower your chest to keep your arms bent.

BALANCE

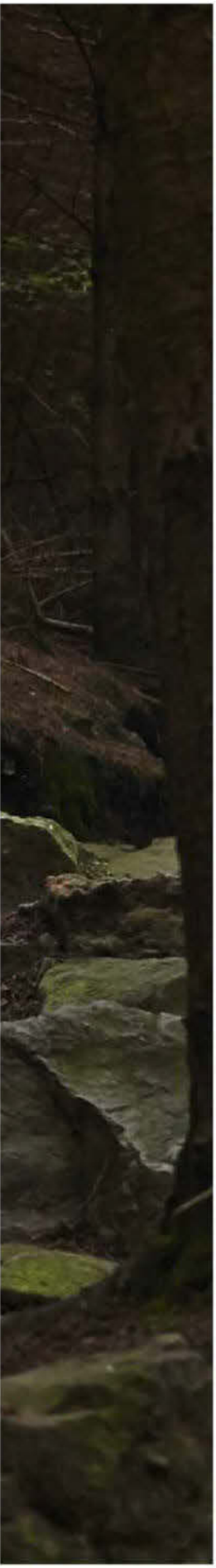
Maintaining balance will keep you in control. Hanging or leaning back can be just as bad as leaning on the handlebar, with all three potentially resulting in you going over the bar. Keep your weight on your feet and your hands light so the bike can move and you can stay in balance.

LINE

The best line depends on your skill level, but you're looking for a combination of smooth and straight, and suitable for the speed you're riding at. Spot your line early, and if it's steep make sure you're committed – trying to change direction at the last minute can be disastrous.

GNARLY ROCK GARDENS

Gnarly rock gardens can be found on black graded trails and downhill runs. They're usually quite long and steep, with a couple of different lines to choose between. The key to riding rough rock gardens is to stay as smooth as possible and remain in control by letting the bike move around underneath you while keeping your core as still as possible. To do this, you need to let your arms and legs bend and extend to match the terrain and keep your weight over the most stable part of the bike – the bottom bracket. You should definitely be familiar with hitting drops and be able to manual before riding big rock gardens, just in case you have to get the front wheel out of trouble if it all goes wrong.





1 **APPROACH** Set your speed before you enter the rock garden, bearing in mind that you'll pick up pace. Look for a good line and commit early by squaring up to the direction you want to go with your hips and head.

2 **IMPACTS** Absorb square-edged rock impacts by unweighting the wheel that's going to hit them so you can stay smooth. If the front wheel is going up on to an edge, allow your arms to bend, and pop the front wheel up if it's a big rock.







3 **STEPS** If the front wheel is going to drop away from you, make sure you get your body low and let your arms extend so you don't get pulled forwards off the drop. This is exactly the same technique as rolling a drop, just faster and more reactive. Push the front wheel out if it's a big drop.

4 **EXIT** Once you know you're safe, focus on the exit and look towards the next feature. If you think you're about to go over the bar, drop your hips and push the front wheel out in front of you as hard as possible – and don't grab the brakes! This technique may help you save it, rather than stack it.

NEXT MONTH

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A long summer of riding takes its toll on your bike. Here's how to silence any nasty creaks and groans!



01 Chain slap

A dead cert for noise is the chain slapping against the frame over rough ground. Use some brake cleaner or degreaser to clean the rear triangle/swingarm and you should be able to see where the chain is hitting the frame. Use a chainstay protector, the soft (looped) side of some sticky-backed Velcro or some thick rubber mastic tape to cover any areas of contact. The top and bottom of the driveside chainstay and the inner face of the seatstay are all worth covering if you can.

02 Squeaky seat

If you can hear creaking when you're sat down or putting weight on the saddle, remove the post from the frame and the saddle from the post. Give the saddle clamp and rails a good clean and a light coating of grease. Then reassemble, checking the torque settings of all the bolts. Lightly coat the inside of the seat tube with grease or (if the post or frame is made from carbon fibre) carbon assembly compound, then refit the post in the frame.

03 Creaky cranks

Noises from the crank area can be a nightmare to pin down. First, check the chainring bolts are tight – if not, apply some grease then tighten to the correct torque. Next, following the manufacturer's instructions, treat your pedals to some fresh grease. If you ride flats, check the pins are tight too. If the creak's still there, it's likely an issue with the BB or crank/BB interface. Remove the cranks, disassemble the BB system, then regrease, reassemble and check all the torque settings.

04 Dry mech

Whining noise from your rear mech? The jockey wheels are probably running dry. On a SRAM Type 2 mech, use the Cage Lock to make them easier to access. With any other mech, remove the rear wheel from the frame. Use a 3mm Allen key to remove both jockey wheels. It's vital to remember which was on top because they move slightly differently. Remove any bearing covers, clean everything thoroughly, coat all moving parts in grease and reassemble.

05 Cockpit woes

Creaks from the bar/stem area are common, and sometimes the fix is as simple as making sure all the bolts are correctly torqued up. If that doesn't do the trick, take the bar and stem off the bike, clean the clamping surfaces (the centre of the bar and the faceplate and steerer clamp of the stem) and apply a light coating of grease or carbon assembly compound to the clamping surfaces and all the bolt threads before reassembling.

Muc-Off Visit our website at www.muc-off.com



Tools for the job Essential kit

1 Degreaser
2 Allen key set
3 Torx T25 key (only needed if chainring bolts are Torx head, not Allen head)
4 Zipties
5 Grease or carbon assembly compound
6 Brake pad spreader (can also use a large, clean flat-headed screwdriver)
7 Bottom bracket tool (make sure to get the right type for your BB)

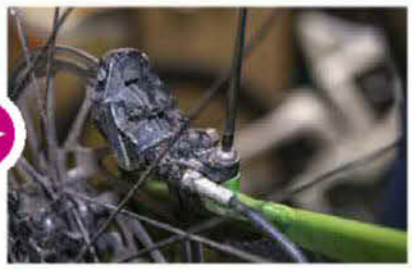
Not pictured
8 Chainstay protector (can also use rubber mastic tape or some sticky-backed Velcro)
9 Hollowtech II crank removal tool (if you have Shimano cranks)



06 Squealing brakes







01 Brake noise can often be traced to a misaligned calliper. Remove the wheel and use a pad spreader to carefully push the hydraulic pistons back into the calliper. Then loosen the calliper mount bolts so it can move freely from side to side.

02 Replace the wheel in the frame, then squeeze the lever as if you were braking. It should 'pump up' when the pads first make contact with the rotor, then achieve a consistent feel.

03 With the lever pulled against the bar, do up the calliper bolts with a 5mm Allen key, swapping between them every half turn. Spin the wheel. The calliper should be central over the rotor, with no contact between the pads and rotor when you're not braking.

07 Rattly suspension







01 Worn shock bushes are a common cause of noise. Unbolt the shock from the frame, noting its orientation. Pick an end, hold the shock bush spacer kit between your thumb and forefinger (while still in the shock) and wobble it to see if there's any play.

02 Remove the spacer kit from the shock and check it for wear. If there's a lot of damage, it'll need replacing. Inspect the shock bush itself, looking for scoring or burring. If there's a lot of damage, you'll need to get your local bike shop to press in a new shock bush.

03 If the shock bush and spacer kit are OK, give the internal spacer a thin smear of grease, then push it back through the shock bush. Sit the outer spacers on it. Then repeat steps 1 to 3 at the other end of the shock.

08 Cable clatter







01 Cables often bash against each another and rattle around in/on the frame. Where cables are tapping each other, use a ziptie to hold them together. Don't do it up super-tight – the cables still need to be able to move when you turn the handlebar.

02 If that doesn't allow enough cable movement, use two interlocking zipties to limit the cable flapping without affecting your steering.

03 If the cable outers are moving around in the frame's cable guides or internal routing, you can stop the noise with a couple of small zipties. A ziptie around the outer at each end of the cable routing will stop it moving, keeping everything quieter.

NEXT MONTH **How to repair a puncture**
Your step-by-step guide to fixing flats **ON SALE 12 DECEMBER**

ASK MBUK

YOUR PROBLEMS SOLVED BY OUR EXPERTS

Q I've identified a couple of new bike candidates from recent reviews in your mag – the Whyte T-129 Works SCR and PYGA Oneten29. As the PYGA is a frame-only option, I'd need to put the bike together myself with the help of my LBS. And to stick to my £3,000 budget, I'd need to fit lower-spec kit than that on the Whyte. Although I like the idea of putting the Pyga together myself, I'm a bit cautious because I won't get a chance to test ride it. Is one bike an obvious choice over the other?
Murray McLaren, via email


Whyte's T-129 Works SCR is a superb package, as long as you're happy going 1x11

A The PYGA is a solid, nicely put together frame that rides really well, but it's hard to knock the T-129 Works SCR package. The Whyte is one of only a very, very few bikes that we've ever awarded a full five stars to, which speaks volumes. The 1x11 drivetrain, sorted suspension, great geometry and stiff, accurate RockShox Pike fork (especially important on a big-wheeler) make it one of the best 29ers we've ever ridden. It'll handle one hell of a pasting, and with this build certainly won't hold you back. The SCR frame is designed around a single chainring and won't accept a front mech. If you're OK with that, it could well be the bike for you!


Bell's Super 2R gives more protection than a trail lid, but not enough for DH use

Q I currently have a THE full-face for downhill and a Giro Xen for less serious stuff. With both helmets looking a bit scruffy, is there one lid that could cover both uses? I've noticed the new MET Parachute HES passes all the certified full-face tests.
Mike Gordon, via email

A The idea behind the likes of the MET Parachute and Bell Super 2R is to up protection for trail riders and enduro racers without losing too much ventilation. But these lightweight lids aren't going to protect your head as well as a DH-specific full-face. If you're still keen on riding a lot of DH, we'd invest in something like a Bell Transfer-9 or Giro Cipher, which balance protection, weight and ventilation well, and don't cost a fortune either.

Q I need to replace the fork on my Rocky Mountain Element. I've been told the RockShox Sektor RL is good, but is there anything else worth considering? I prefer riding downhill-style trails.
Dan Taylor, via email

A If you're into more demanding trails, a fork with better damping and a stiffer chassis is certainly worth considering. The Sektor RL is a good fork for the money (£375, for the 26in version), but if you can stretch a little further, the X-Fusion Slant RL2 is worth a look. For £454.99 you get stiffer 34mm stanchions, 100-160mm (3.9-6.3in) of travel and the decent RL2 damper. It uses a 15mm axle though, so you may need to upgrade your front hub too.

QUICK FIX MOUNTAIN BIKE TIPS

How to lube your chain





01 Thoroughly clean and degrease your chain, then hang your bike in a workstand or prop it up in such a way that you can turn the cranks without obstruction.

02 While slowly turning the cranks anticlockwise, drip some lubricant on to the inner side of the chain. You should be able to see the lube work its way into each link as you go. Aim to do two complete revolutions of the chain while lubing it to make sure.

03 Wrap a rag around the chain and, holding it loosely while rotating the cranks anticlockwise, use it to carefully wipe off any excess lube. When finished, your chain should be shiny and gleaming, and not dripping lube on to the floor.

CONTACT US: **Write to:** Ask *MBUK*, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW **Email:** askmbuk@bikeradar.com **Visit:** www.mbuk.com

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WHYTE 629 29er

£749.99 RRP £999.99

2014 Model



6061 Hydo Formed T6 Aluminium, Custom Drawn, Multi Butted with Post Mount Dropouts Frame, SRAM PC 1031, 10 Speed Chain, SRAM X-5, 10 Speed Shifters.

GT Avalanche Comp

£399.99 RRP £599.99

2014 Model



Hydroformed 6061 T6 Aluminium Frame, Triple Triangle, Zerostack 1 1/8" Head Tube, KMC Z99 Chain, Shimano Alivio, SL-M430, Rapid Fire Shifters.

GIANT Trance 1 X 29er

£1399.99 RRP £1999.99

2014 Model



Fox 32 Float CTD Evolution with 15mm thru-axle Fork, Fox CTD Evolution Rear Shock, SRAM X9 Type 2 Rear Derailleur, Shimano M446 Hydraulic Disc Brakes.

WHYTE T-129 29er

£1199.99 RRP £1699.99

2014 Model



6061 T6 Aluminium Front Triangle with Tapered Head Tube and Alloy Rear Triangle with 142 Dropouts Frame, SRAM PC 1031, 10 Speed Chain, SRAM X-7, 10 Speed Shifters

GT Zaskar 9R Comp 29er

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2014 Model



GT Speed Metal alloy Hydroformed Frame, KMC X10 Chain, Formula C1 Brakes & Brake Levers, Shimano Bottom Bracket, All Terra Colarado Saddle.

KONA Process 134

£1499.99 RRP £2198.99

2014 Model



6061 Aluminum Butted 134mm Travel Frame, RockShox Sektor Silver Air Forks, RockShox Monarch R Rear Shock, Sram X5/ Shimano SLX, Shimano Deore Brakes

GIANT Glory 0

£2999.99 RRP £4999.99

2014 Model



ALUXX SL-Grade Aluminium Frame, KMC X-10 Chain, SRAM X0 10 Speed Shifters, Avid XO Trail Hydraulic Disc Brakes, Giant Contact AM Handlebars.

GIANT XTC Comp 2 29er

£999.99 RRP £1399.99

2014 Model



Giant Composite Technology Frame, RockShox Recon Gold 29", 100mm Travel, Poploc, QR15, Tapered Steerer Fork, Shimano Deore Shadow + Rear Derailleur, Shimano M395, hydraulic disc, 160mm Brakes.

GT Zaskar 9R Elite 29er

£899.99 RRP £1499.99

2014 Model



GT Speed Metal alloy Hydroformed Frame, KMC X10 Chain, Formula RX Brakes & Brake Levers, Shimano SLX Bottom Bracket, GT Statement Grips.

KONA Process 134 Deluxe

£1999.99 RRP £2998.99

2014 Model



6061 Aluminum Butted 134mm Travel Frame, RockShox Revelation RL Solo Air Forks, RockShox Monarch RT Rear Shocks, Sram X7/Shimano XT, Shimano SLX Brakes

GIANT Anthem X 2 29er

£1199.99 RRP £1699.99

2014 Model



RockShox Reba RL Solo Air 15mm thru-axle, OverDrive 2 steerer suspension fork, RockShox Monarch RT rear shock, Shimano M395 hydraulic disc brake, Giant S-XC rims and hubs.

GIANT Anthem 2 27.5

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2014 Model



RockShox Reba RL Solo Air 15mm thru-axle, OverDrive 2 steerer suspension fork, RockShox Monarch RT rear shock, Avid Elixir 5, hydraulic disc brake, Giant P-XC rims.

GIANT Anthem 3 27.5

£999.99 RRP £1499.99

2014 Model



RockShox Recon Gold RL Solo Air with 15mm thru-axle, OverDrive steerer suspension fork, RockShox Monarch R rear shock, Shimano Deore 2x10-speed drivetrain with hydraulic disc brakes, KMC X10 chain.

GT Zaskar 9R Sport 29er

£599.99 RRP £999.99

2014 Model



Hydroformed 6061 T6 Aluminium Frame, Triple Triangle, Zerostack 1 1/8" Head Tube, KMC X10 Chain, Shimano Deore, SL-M610, Rapid Fire Shifters.

GIANT Anthem Advanced 2

£1699.99 RRP £2499.99

2014 Model



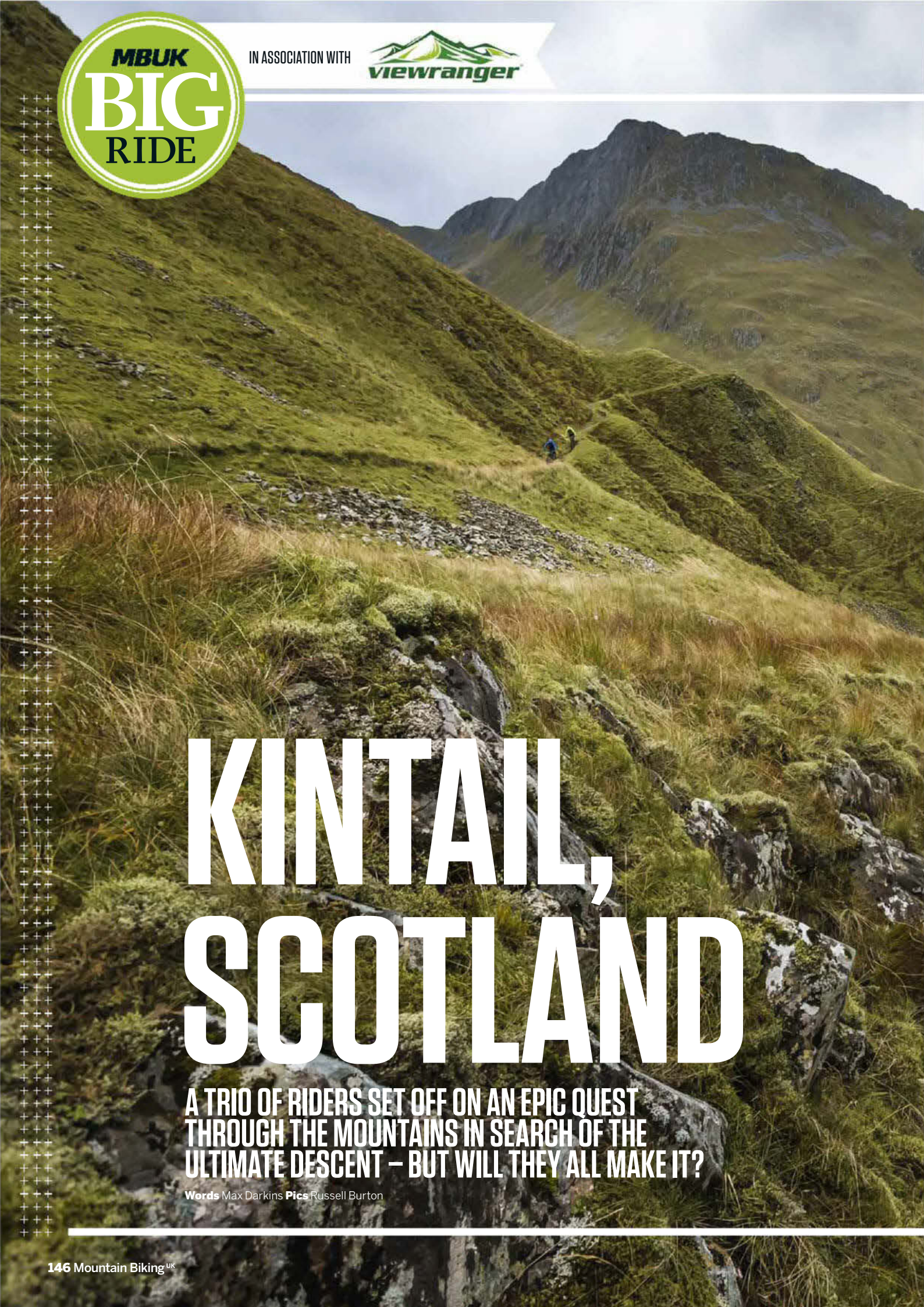
RockShox Reba RL with 15mm thru-axle, Push-Loc, OverDrive 2 steerer suspension fork, RockShox Monarch R rear shock, Avid Elixir 7, hydraulic disc brakes, SRAM X7 20speed shifters.

All prices are correct at the time of going to press. See website for latest price updates and offers. Please see website for terms and conditions.

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MBUK BIG RIDE

IN ASSOCIATION WITH viewranger



KINTAIL, SCOTLAND

A TRIO OF RIDERS SET OFF ON AN EPIC QUEST THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS IN SEARCH OF THE ULTIMATE DESCENT – BUT WILL THEY ALL MAKE IT?

Words Max Darkins **Pics** Russell Burton



MBUK BIG RIDE

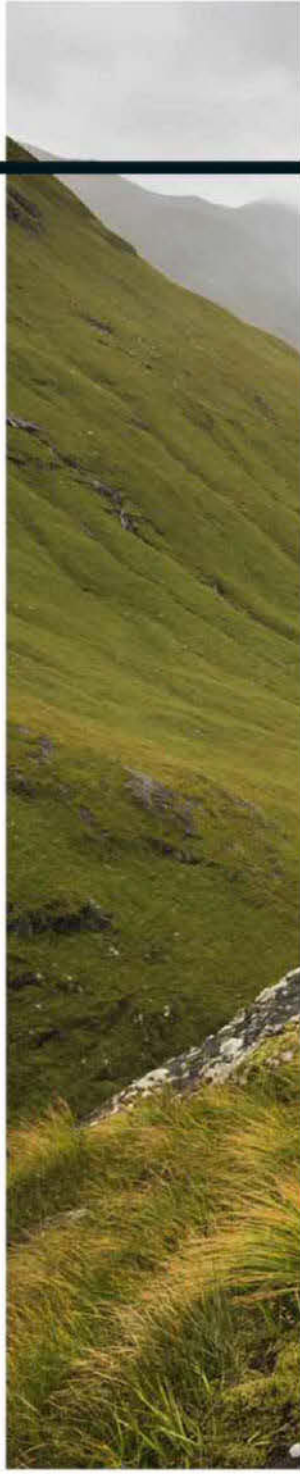
IN ASSOCIATION WITH viewranger



Big hills, big skies, big routes – three things Scotland has in spades



Some parts of the ride are a rocky techfest





THE LOWDOWN

KINTAIL



The Scottish Highlands have a wealth of amazing trails to ride, but the mountainous terrain and inclement weather requires careful planning and proper equipment to stay safe.
www.visithighlands.com

It's been one hell of a drive, but we eventually pull off the main road beside the peaceful shores of Loch Duich, on the west coast of Scotland. Former *MBUK* staffer Ric, now the man on the mic for Red Bull at the World Cup finish line, has agreed to join Russell and me, unaware of what lies in store.

We set off along the valley bottom. Heavy rainfall has left big puddles, but the fun stone track is mud free and the hills all around us are stunning, if somewhat daunting. We make good progress along this 6km stretch of trail to a lonesome building, which could provide a handy shelter. Luckily the weather's on our side at the moment, so we continue along the thin singletrack, passing over a wooden bridge that spans a deep ravine.

The swollen river is rushing and roaring beneath us, dark, jagged hills rise ahead and ominous looking clouds hang over the valley. I feel like Gollum, leading Frodo and Samwise Gamgee into the depths of Mordor, uncertain of our fate.

Lone rider

With fresh legs and eager minds, we try our damnedest to ride as much of the trail as possible, but a number of technical sections defeat even our best attempts. There are seemingly endless water bar crossings too, and though we start off enjoying the 'will I/won't I make it?' challenge, they start to consume a bit too much of our time. The 29in wheels of my Orange Segment are a definite help, with the chunky tubeless tyres providing extra confidence.

We're just discussing how easy it would be to get multiple pinch punctures here when a lone cyclocross rider appears, carrying his drop-barred bike. He hasn't been up here before and had planned to do the route we're doing, but backwards. But he's had to walk a lot of it and is now wondering where to go. 'The loony bin,' is the first thought to cross my mind, but we end up advising him that he's probably best off turning around and coming back the same way he came. We wish him luck, and a fast recovery.

We pass a waterfall, but it's not exactly paddling weather and the clouds are providing »

WE TRY OUR DAMNEDEST TO RIDE AS MUCH OF THE TRAIL AS POSSIBLE, BUT A NUMBER OF TECHNICAL SECTIONS DEFEAT OUR BEST ATTEMPTS



"Anyone home?" We could do with a nice hot brew right now

Community Route

Each month a member of the ViewRanger community shares their bonus route with you

viewranger



Name: Steve Orr **From:** Inverness
Route: Coire Lair & Coire Grannda, Torridon

This is an excellent route through the mountains of Torridon, also in the Northwest Highlands. The climb up into Coire Lair is mostly ridable, with a relatively short section near the top being the only real part where you have to get off and carry. It's well worth it though for the views and the amazing blast that is the final descent to Annat.



To get this great ride just scan the QR code with your mobile device



enough of a shower as it is, so we carry on, with our target of lunch at Camban Bothy.

By the time we reach the shelter the wind has picked up and is whistling down the valley, but sitting in the dark, dingy bothy is no more appealing. We do have a posh pork pie lunch though, cunningly purchased from the House of Bruar on the A9 during our journey north, to enjoy in a room with a view. The setting can't be beaten, but sadly the pies have dried out and don't prove the trailside delicacy we'd hoped for. To top it off, we're chilled to the bone sat in our wet clothes, so lunch is cut disappointingly short.

The deer hunters

Our spirits are soon lifted again by a fun, rocky descent that brings smiles to our faces and blood back into our extremities as we crash down to the river and the meeting of many paths. The medley of trails here causes momentary confusion, but some friendly hunters in an eight-wheeled off-road vehicle – not too dissimilar to a beefed-up golf buggy – point us further down the valley, to "a better trail". I'm not convinced, and sure enough we find ourselves back at the same spot, which the hunters have now vacated. We spot them heading up the valley to where we wanted to go – they were obviously on the trail of some deer and weren't about to let us spoil their fun.

The faint, grassy singletrack soon morphs into a lovely stone track that weaves its way up the valley, and we do our best to chase the hunters down. The all-too-regular water bars have us dismounting again though, and I wonder if it might not be a bad cyclocross training ride after all. In a while the trail comes to an abrupt end and the dirt track ahead hasn't fared well in the recent rain. The ground is just about ridable, though the lead rider occasionally falls foul of a wheel- or foot-swallowing bog, much to the amusement of the rest of us.

BEST EATING

There's nowhere to eat on the route, so come prepared. For post-ride refuelling, there's the Jac-o-Bite restaurant and Kintail Lodge Hotel, both a couple of miles down the road on the A87.

Swamp monsters

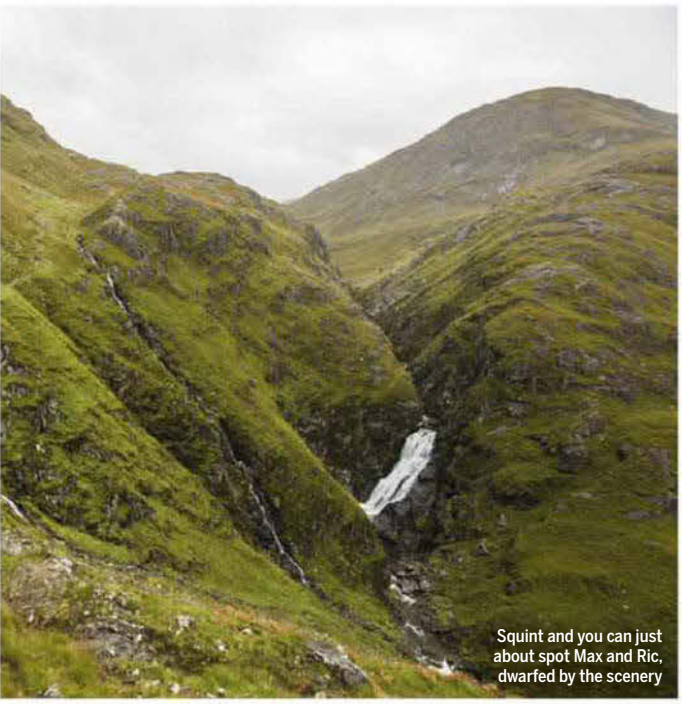
The terrain quickly saps our energy, and Ric is cursing the consequences of not ordering a full Scottish breakfast this morning as we fight our way through the swamp. When his eyes glaze over and he starts to mumble things about following the lights into the depths of the dead marshes, I shove a couple of Clif Shot Bloks into his hand and pop him back on his bike and back into reality.

It's not long before we're back off the bikes and hiking up the Bealach an Sgairne pass, which reminds me of Nan Bield in the Lake District. The gale force wind at the top makes the



Majestic, awesome, epic, breathtaking... OK, you get the idea

THE GALE FORCE WIND AT THE TOP MAKES THE TECHNICAL START TO THE DOWNHILL EVEN MORE INTERESTING



Squint and you can just about spot Max and Ric, dwarfed by the scenery

technical start to the downhill even more interesting, but the wind dies down as we descend and the trail eases up, and we're soon speeding along, hollering with joy.

The deer up on the hills above us start to bark and follow us down the valley, and it now feels like we're the ones being hunted. It just adds another dimension to one of the best descents and finishes to a ride I've ever had, and we soon outpace them with a frantic dash back to the van. There's a tap and hose at the car park, so we give our bikes a quick rinse-off and pop a little extra dosh in the contributions box. Trail centres? Pah, who needs 'em? Well, maybe the cyclocross rider, who we haven't seen again. And Ric could certainly do with some food right now. Lembas bread, anyone?

WHAT IS VIEWRANGER?

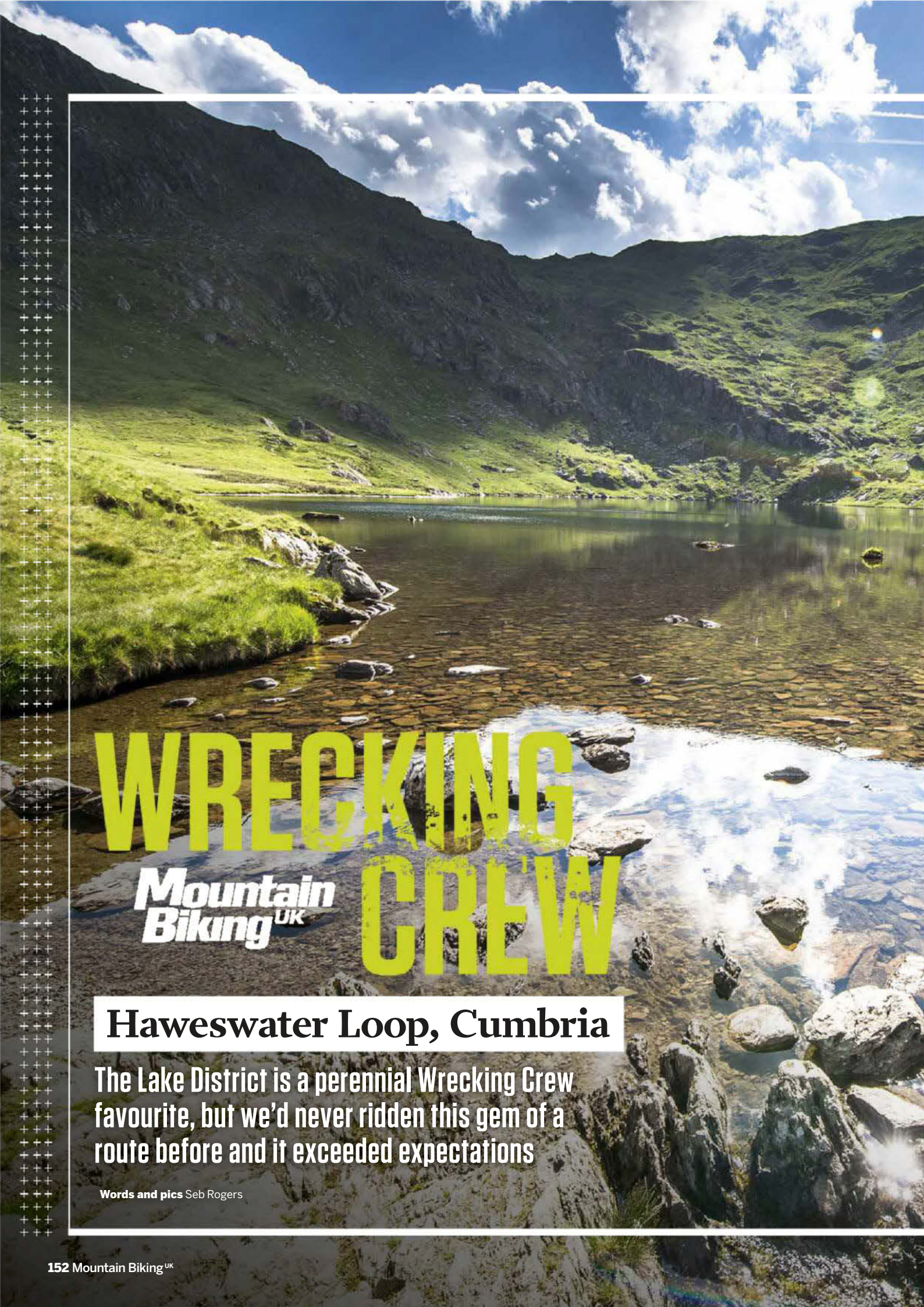
ViewRanger is an app that lets outdoor enthusiasts discover, plan, navigate and share their adventures on smartphones, on tablets and online. With offline mapping (including Ordnance Survey maps), turn-by-turn navigation and bike computer functions like ride time, ride distance and current, average and maximum speed, it'll turn your phone into a fully fledged GPS unit.

You can also use it to plan or download routes, access guidebook-style information, broadcast your location and track your friends. It has a social platform too, where you can store and share their adventures.

ViewRanger is used by more than 400 official bodies, including search-and-rescue teams in the UK and overseas.



The ViewRanger app is available to download for Apple, Android, Blackberry 10, Kindle Fire and Symbian devices.



WRECKING CREW

Mountain Biking UK

Haweswater Loop, Cumbria

The Lake District is a perennial Wrecking Crew favourite, but we'd never ridden this gem of a route before and it exceeded expectations

Words and pics Seb Rogers



THE LOWDOWN

HAWESWATER LOOP

DISTANCE: 10 MILES (16KM)
CLIMBING: 3,015FT (922M)
TIME: 3-5 HOURS
GRADING: DIFFICULT

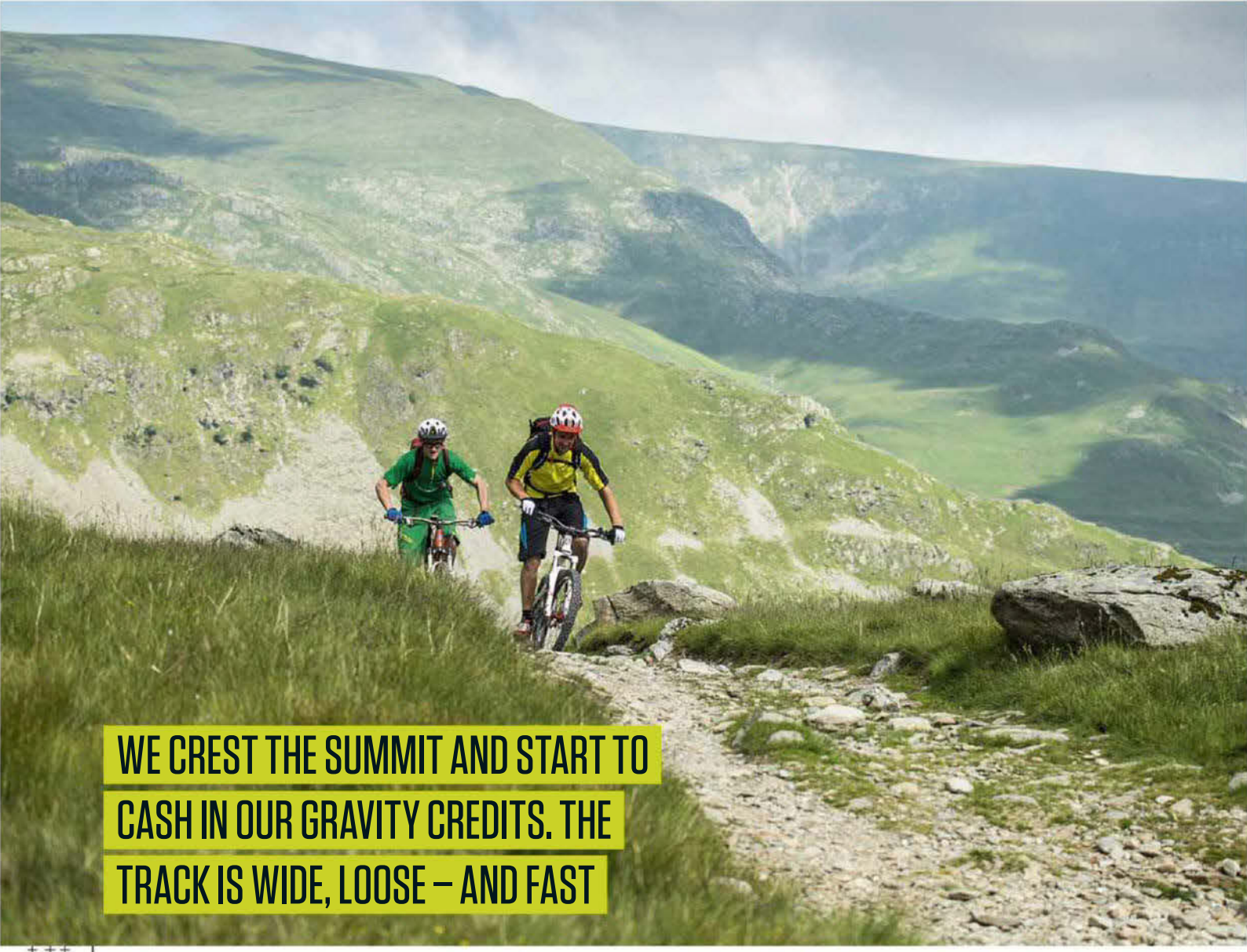
WHY RIDE HERE? This route incorporates a bit of everything that's great about the area

RAD...

- Epic views
- Amazing descents
- Away from the crowds

BAD...

- Tough climbs
- Severe final descent



WE CREST THE SUMMIT AND START TO CASH IN OUR GRAVITY CREDITS. THE TRACK IS WIDE, LOOSE – AND FAST

Why is it that butchers' dogs are the standard by which everyone else is judged? I've never been sure. But watching Clive disappear rapidly up the fellside ahead of me, I've also never been surer that he's as fit as one. A butcher's dog, that is. And, equally, that Chris and I aren't – though Chris is doing a spirited job of trying to keep pace. Given our location, perhaps 'sheep farmer's dog' would be more appropriate.

The climb is relentless. But that, my friends, is a price well worth paying. One thing you can rely on in the Lake District is big hills, and big hills come with big climbs and that's not everyone's cup of tea. Chris is suffering with an over-geared, heavy, single-chainring bike. But it'll all be worth it on the other side, because every big climb leads to an equally big descent. Judging by the sweat beading on our forearms, the descent is going to be a monster.

World class riding destination that it is, the Lake District comes with a downside – the popular routes have been done to death. Helvellyn, High Street, Borrowdale... they're names that are as familiar to British mountain bikers as Hope and Orange – and with good reason, because they're fantastic places.

Inside knowledge

We wanted to ride the path less trodden, so we turned to Lakes-based guiding company CycleActive for some advice. "We want fun, interesting, not too long... and relatively little known," we said. "How about Haweswater, Small Water, Kentmere, Stile End, Gatescarth?" replied Jon from CycleActive. "Danny Mac filmed there a couple of years ago," he added, by way of an afterthought. Danny MacAskill? We're there.

In hindsight, the fact that one of the world's best trials riders had chosen part of our intended route for filming should perhaps have given us pause for thought. But we were out of the door and on the M6 before you could »



A little slice of MTB heaven... and the sunshine is a bonus



Chris and Clive are like happy bunnies bouncing down the trail

The Wrecking Crew Who are we?



SEB ROGERS
Long-time *MBUK* snapper, bike tester and writer



GUEST RIDER

CHRIS SMITH
The UK's original pro freerider, and handy on a trail bike too



GUEST RIDER

CLIVE FORTH
Ex pro racer, now a mountain bike guide and skills guru



JAMES BLACKWELL
Five feet of trouble, Jamer rides quick and talks quicker.



ROB WEAVER
Tech ed Rob is a racer at heart and loves a bit of DH.



ANDREW DODD
Doddy's on a never-ending quest to find the ultimate trail.



THE REGULAR'S OPINION

"Being in the glorious sunshine surrounded by some of the finest scenery and trail riding the UK has to offer, a day like this rivals any day in the Alps. This Lakes loop has a great mix of trails – stiff climbs, techy climbs, fast descents and challenging rock sections that need pinpoint accuracy and top bike-handling skills. It's our very own backyard bike track with all the right ingredients."

CLIVE FORTH RACER AND SKILLS GURU



Get in the zone for the final rocky descent – it's super technical



THE DESCENT IS ROCKY, TECHNICAL AND UNYIELDING IN ITS INTENSITY. CLIVE AND CHRIS ARE IN THEIR ELEMENT

say "last one to the trailhead's a roadie". Jon couldn't join us on the day, but Scotland-based guide and Wrecking Crew regular Clive Forth was only too happy to step in. Turns out the Lakes is only an hour or so south for him, so it's one of his regular stomping grounds.

Dead end

Haweswater is an oddity in Lakeland terms, in that it's stuck out on a limb in the north-eastern corner with only a singletrack road leading to it, which ends in a dead end. Or at least, it does if you're in a car (or on a road bike). If you're in a 4x4 (or, better, on a mountain bike), you can simply carry on up the gravel track that forms the Gatescarth Pass. Wide, loose and with the steeper bits broken up with S-bends, it's both a quick way to gain height away from the lake and a good test of fitness.

We pass a couple of walkers out scouting a new route for a guidebook. Actually, they pass us, because we've stopped for a break and to admire the incredible view. We compare notes about trail conditions, weather, the usual stuff, before parting ways. As they continue to head upwards, we crest the summit of the pass and start to cash in our gravity credits.

The track here is as wide and loose as it was on the climb, but easily 10 times as fast. We're all in our big rings (except Chris, who doesn't have one) and out of the saddle, feeling the cooling breeze generated by our speed dry the sweat of the climb. Chris and Clive find plenty to play on as we lose height, from loose, drifty corners to airtime-worthy water bars.

Gradient alert

We're having so much fun we miss the turning to take us up over Stile End, but it's no hassle – we simply double back on another bridleway and pick it up. The day has turned out hot, dry and sunny, plus we've got the place more or less to ourselves, which adds to the fun. As we wind our way up the Kentmere valley the silence is broken only by the sound of the occasional stream crossing or the plaintive baaing of a lost lamb. A »





WRECKING CREW WISDOM

"This is a remote corner of the Lakes, so you should go prepared for anything as there's no easy bail-out and no phone signal. Pack clothes for bad weather (it can change very quickly), plenty of food and water, plus tools and spares so you can keep your bike rolling if you suffer a mechanical. You'll need a map too, even if you bring a GPS. Take it easy on the final descent – it's one of the toughest just-about-ridable trails we know, so ride within your ability."

SEB ROGERS *MBUK* TESTER

LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

LOCALS DO...

- Pack a waterproof even if the forecast is sunny
- Take a first aid kit
- Keep an eye out for walkers and slow down to pass them

LOCALS DON'T...

- Leave litter
- Go out without checking the weather forecast

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WAS £2999
NOW £2499
0% Option £267 deposit + 24mthly payments of £93

CRUSH AM 27.5"

NEW 2015

OUR PRICE £1299
0% *Example £147 deposit + 24 monthly payments of £48

With Fox 32 forks £1369
0% *Example £145 deposit + 24 monthly payments of £51



2014 ALPINE 160 26"

ALPINE RS 26"
WAS £3599
NOW £3199
0% *Example £355 deposit + 36 monthly payments of £79

ALPINE AM 26"
WAS £2799
NOW £2249
0% *Example £223 deposit + 36 monthly payments of £56

SALE



TURNER BURNER TRAIL

Spec from £3190
0% *Example £349 deposit + 36 payments of £79

2014



Burner Frame only from £1695
0% Example *£183 Deposit + 24 payments of £63
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0% Example *£406 Deposit + 36 payments of £94

PROCESS 153

NEW 2015



OUR PRICE £2899
0% Option £307 deposit + 36mthly payments of £72

ZESTY AM 327 (650B)

SALE 2014



WAS £2299 NOW £1999
0% Option £223 deposit + 24mthly payments of £74

ZESTY AM 327

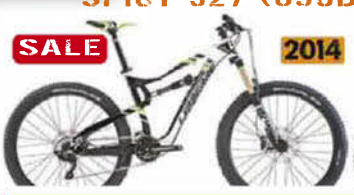
NEW 2015



OUR PRICE £2199
0% Option £255 deposit + 36mthly payments of £54

SPICY 327 (650B)

SALE 2014



WAS £2399 NOW £1999
0% Option £223 deposit + 24mthly payments of £74

SPICY 327

NEW 2015



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If you've never ridden in the Lakes, get your arse over there –it's unbeatable

cursory glance at the map sets alarm bells ringing in my head. There are a couple of sections of closely packed contour lines ahead of us, and that can only mean one thing. Very. Steep. Climb. Small ring grind becomes out of the saddle grunt becomes push becomes plod.

It's hot by now and the gradient is relentless, but the views – and the promise of a Danny Mac-inspired descent – keep us going. The panorama from the top of Nan Bield Pass would be breathtaking even without the climb that precedes it, so we pause for a good gander and to catch our breath before setting about the descent.

What goes up...

And what a descent it turns out to be – rocky, technical and unyielding in its intensity. Clive and Chris are in their element, bouncing and picking their way through the boulders for all the world as if they're not even there. Which, I can attest, they most definitely are. (I mention it to Jon from CycleActive the next day and he laughs: "Going up that way would've been easier!" Now he tells me...)



All this... is mine! Well, that's how it feels when you've got the landscape to yourself

Back at the cars by the shore of Haweswater, it's big grins all round. That was a great Lakeland loop – a compact epic that deserves classic ride status. Clive announces that, on a scale of technicality from one to 10, that final rocky descent would be a *Spinal Tap*-style 11. But I suspect Danny Mac knew that all along...

THE DIRECTORY

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT **HAWESWATER**

GET THERE

Leave the M6 at junction 40 (Penrith/Keswick) and follow the A66 towards Penrith, then the A6 towards Shap and the B5320 for Ullswater. The road to Haweswater is signed about a mile (1.6km) after the B5320 turning. It's a dead end with plenty of parking at the trailhead.

FACILITIES

None! There's a hotel and mountain rescue post about two miles (3km) up the road past Haweswater. Other than that, there are no facilities at all. Come prepared!

CONTACT

www.lakedistrict.gov.uk
www.cycleactive.co.uk

BIKE SHOPS

Arragon's Cycle Centre, Penrith
www.arragons.com
01768 890344

WHAT ELSE IS NEARBY?

Borrowdale Bash
Classic low-level Lakeland route out of Keswick
Whinlatter
All-weather trail centre near Keswick with great views
Grizedale
Forest-based trail centre in the southern Lakes

VERDICT

Don't be fooled by the relatively short distance – this is a tough route that'll keep you on your toes, and the final descent has a big sting in the tail. But it's well worth the effort, because the quality of riding, the views and the solitude are all epic.

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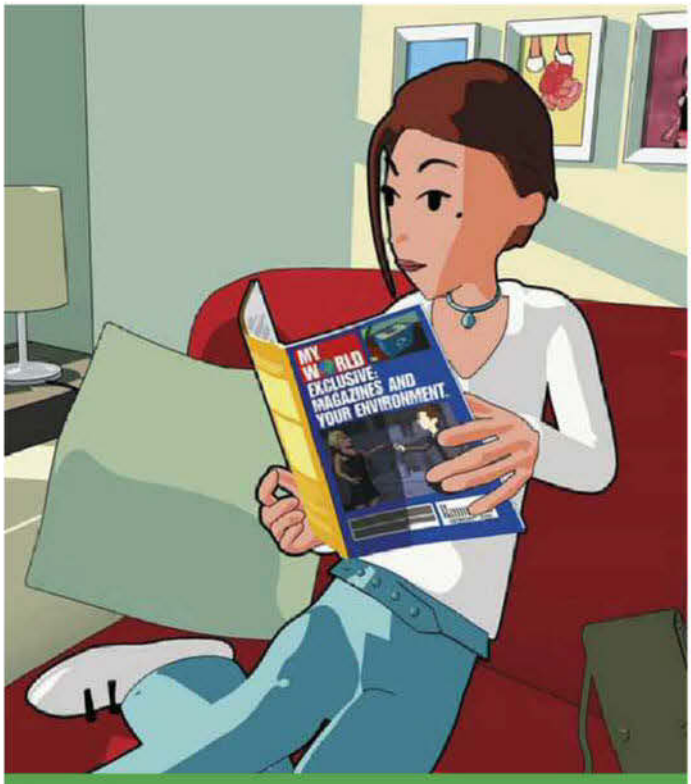


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GT

2012

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ZASKAR ELITE 29ER	RRP £1400	NOW £919.99
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2012

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2013

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LTD RACE	RRP £1050	NOW £759.99

mongoose

2012

TYAX COMP	RRP £500	NOW £339.99
SALVO SPORT	RRP £700	NOW £549.99
SALVO COMP	RRP £1000	NOW £599.99

SCOTT

2010

ASPECT 35	RRP £650	NOW £449.99

2011

SCALE 40	RRP £1600	NOW £999.99

2012

GENIUS LT30	RRP £3400	NOW £2049.99
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SCALE PREMIUM	RRP £5300	NOW £2649.99

2013

SCALE 740	RRP £1800	NOW £1439.99

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2012

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2012

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RZ120 XLR2	RRP £2900	NOW £2199.99
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FLASH ALLOY 1	RRP £2000	NOW £1249.99

2013

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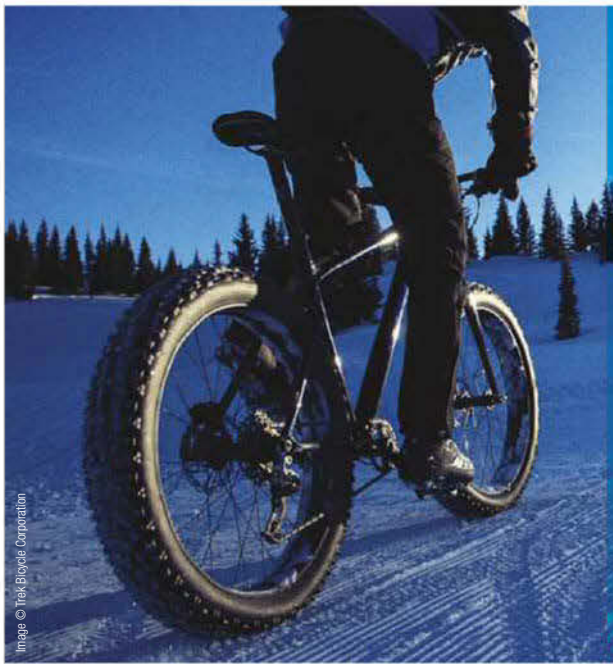
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